



International Association of Fire Chiefs

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April 13, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

On behalf of the nation's fire and EMS chiefs, I am writing to share with you the needs of those who are the "warriors" at the "tip of the spear" in this war with an unseen enemy. Every day, we treat, care, and transport people to hospitals, and expose ourselves to this contagious virus. On the date this letter is being written, there have been at least five firefighters and EMS deaths from coronavirus that we know of. Additionally, since the beginning of this crisis, we have documented over 1,000 firefighters and EMS personnel who are diagnosed with the coronavirus, approximately 5,000 who have been quarantined, and more than 20,000 who have been exposed. Firefighters and EMS personnel are the first and last line of defense in our communities, running directly into harm's way to assist vulnerable citizens. If we lose our emergency personnel to the disease, we cannot transport people to hospitals and protect our community members.

We applaud your efforts and those of Congress to secure passage of the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136). This economic stimulus was needed, along with funding for those who are fighting this terrible disease in the hospitals, health departments, and companies working to find a solution. However, we do not feel -- as the "warriors" on the frontline of this battle -- that our needs during this pandemic have been addressed fully in the CARES Act. We respectfully ask that you consider the following proposals in order that firefighters and EMS personnel may remain safe, healthy, and better positioned to serve our communities:

Special funding of \$5 billion for the Assistance to Firefighters Grants programs (AFG) to support fire and EMS response to COVID-19: Firefighters and EMS personnel place themselves at risk of exposure when responding to, caring for and transporting COVID-19 patients. This funding would be dedicated to support fire departments that are treating, transporting and caring for patients. The \$5 billion funding the AFG program would be targeted for reimbursement and future purchases of personal protective equipment (PPE), including but not limited to NIOSH-approved N95 respirators, gloves, cleaning products, hand sanitizers, gowns, goggles, booties, and other medical equipment and necessary materials. *We ask that the peer review and criteria development requirements for the AFG and SAFER grant programs be waived to ensure that this funding is delivered to fire and EMS departments in an expeditious manner.*

Special funding of \$5 billion for Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs to support fire and EMS response to COVID-19: Fire department budgets have been decimated. The \$5 billion funding the SAFER program would provide reimbursement for backfill and overtime staffing (including overtime labor for budgeted employees and straight-time employees, overtime labor for unbudgeted employees, backfill employee labor, call-back pay, night-time pay, weekend differential pay,

and stand-by time). Additionally, this fund would be in place to prevent the loss of fire department jobs as a result of recession and the loss of taxes to communities because of the economic shutdown. *We ask that the peer review and criteria development requirements for the AFG and SAFER grant programs be waived to ensure that this funding is delivered to fire and EMS departments in an expeditious manner.*

Priority to Equipment in the Strategic National Stockpile: Almost every fire and EMS agency reports shortages of essential medical supplies including NIOSH-approved N95 respirators, gloves, goggles, gowns, and booties. We have received reports of fire chiefs even buying raincoats to protect their personnel because of the lack of PPE. The federal government must prioritize fire department and EMS agency access to PPE and other supplies coming from the Strategic National Stockpile and any relevant state stockpiles. Our personnel must be given every opportunity to remain safe while responding to known and suspected COVID-19 patients. States and counties that accept FEMA funding must be mandated to prioritize fire and EMS in Tier 1 for receiving personal protective equipment (PPE) from the Strategic National Stockpile.

Drug shortages: Fire departments and EMS agencies must be notified as soon as possible about pending drug shortages as well as receive prioritized access to medications as they are released from the Strategic National Stockpile. In February, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that dozens of drugs were expected to enter into shortage due to the large number of COVID-19 patients. However, the FDA refused to identify the specific drugs which makes it exceedingly difficult for fire departments and EMS agencies to identify, procure, and secure approval of alternative medications. These shortages compound existing shortages of basic medications such as saline, epinephrine, and glucose. When these medications are released from the Strategic National Stockpile, fire departments and EMS agencies must receive prioritized access in order to continue caring for critically ill and injured patients in their communities.

Testing and Vaccinations: Firefighters and EMS personnel should be prioritized to receive COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 vaccinations when they are developed and available. Providing testing and vaccinations to firefighters and EMS personnel will ensure that they remain healthy and able to serve their communities without interruption as the public health crisis continues.

Thank you for your leadership during this crisis. With the efforts and support of the federal government, we know that there will be a green light after this red light. However, we desperately need your help and support while we wait at the red light.

Yours in service,



Fire Chief Gary Ludwig
President and Chairman of the Board

- cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
- The Honorable Charles Schumer, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
- The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
- The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives