



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

*A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress*

---

**March 2023**

### **The 118<sup>th</sup> Congress**

#### **Protect the FIRE/SAFER Grant Programs**

- **The Problem:** As fire departments continue to respond to a variety of increased threats, the strain on fire department equipment and personnel remains high. As equipment and overtime/backfill costs escalate, many fire departments across the country cannot afford the equipment, training, and staffing necessary to meet a baseline level of readiness. This situation puts firefighters and their communities in danger. However, these programs are scheduled to be terminated on September 30, 2024
- **The Solution:** The FIRE and SAFER grant programs augment local funding and provide much needed assistance to meet these needs. The programs help fire departments meet their basic needs as the economy slows down. The U.S. Senate is considering the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870), which would reauthorize the FIRE and SAFER grant programs through Fiscal Year (FY) 2030. The FIRE and SAFER grants' termination also would be delayed until September 30, 2032. Congress approved \$360 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2023. President Biden is requesting \$370 million for each program in FY 2024.
- **The Explanation:** *If you have received a grant under the FIRE or SAFER grant programs, explain how you used the money and how it has improved your ability to serve your community in response to all hazards. If you have not received a grant under these programs, explain how you could use that grant money. Give a specific example of how a FIRE or SAFER grant has helped or could help you serve your community.*
- **The "Ask:"** Ask your senators to protect the FIRE and SAFER grant programs by passing the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870). Also, please ask Congress to support \$370 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2024.

#### **Funding for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and National Fire Academy (NFA)**

- **The Problem:** The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) provides necessary training and policy resources to local fire departments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, USFA provided guidance and educational materials to help fire departments protect their personnel and the public and be reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It is important that USFA be funded to continue its critical mission.
- **The Solution:** The Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870) would reauthorize the USFA through FY 2030 at \$95 million for each year. Congress appropriated approximately \$60 million for USFA; however, President Biden is proposing \$72.8 million for USFA.
- **The Explanation:** Explain the importance of increasing USFA's budget. This increase will allow USFA to update the infrastructure at the National Fire Academy and develop a new data system to replace the National Fire Incident Reporting System.
- **The "Ask:"** Ask your representatives and senators to pass S. 870 to reauthorize USFA and fund it at \$72.8 million in FY 2024.

## **EMS Grants for Rural Fire/EMS Agencies**

- **The Problem:** Rural fire and EMS agencies often face uniquely difficult budgetary challenges as they may lack the tax base to provide strong funding and often receive incomplete reimbursements for the cost of providing emergency medical care. As a result, these agencies are struggling even more to afford basic EMS equipment and medication due to increased inflation. Additionally, shortages impacting medications and personal protective equipment have exacerbated these financial challenges by making these essential EMS tools more expensive.
- **The Solution:** The Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) grant program was established in 2018 to provide funding for procuring EMS supplies, recruiting personnel, and running EMS licensure classes. Only public and non-profit fire/EMS agencies are eligible to receive funding. For FY 2023, Congress provided \$10.5 million for the SIREN grant program. In addition, Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced the SIREN Reauthorization Act (S. 265) to extend the authorization of the SIREN grant program through FY 2028.
- **The Explanation:** The SIREN grant assists budget-challenged rural fire and EMS agencies in providing life-saving services in their communities. These grants are for public and non-profit agencies located in rural areas. This eligibility requirement ensures that these funds are provided to fire and EMS agencies in need.
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your representatives and senators to fund the SIREN grants at \$15 million for FY 2024. Also, please ask your senators to co-sponsor S. 265.

## **Supporting First Responder Mental Health Needs**

- **The Problem:** Firefighters and EMS personnel provide vital services to their communities. As a result of the stress from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a rise in significant mental health concerns for first responders. Sadly, many first responders struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health challenges. Very few resources are currently available to pre-emptively identify and treat first responders struggling with these challenges. Additional resources also are needed to educate mental health professionals on the unique mental health needs of firefighters and EMS personnel.
- **The Solution:** Representative Ami Bera (D-CA) and Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV) introduced the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress to assist first responders in addressing mental health needs. The HERO Act would create a peer counseling program to teach firefighters and EMS personnel to identify mental health concerns in their colleagues and refer them to treatment. The HERO Act also would facilitate the creation of educational materials to inform mental health professionals of the mental stressors which are unique to firefighters, EMS personnel, and chief officers. Lastly, the bill would create a registry to track suicides among first responders to identify important trends.
- **The Explanation:** The HERO Act takes a major step to establish pre-emptive solutions to prevent future suicides and mental health emergencies. The peer counseling program educates firefighters and EMS personnel about warning signs to look for in their colleagues as well as identifies treatment options for those in need. While many mental health professionals are superbly qualified, they may be unaware of the unique stressors experienced by firefighters and EMS personnel. The HERO Act’s educational resources will be key in helping these professionals understand their patients’ experiences and identify how to best treat them.
- **The “Ask:”** Please ask your senators and representatives to pass the HERO Act.

## **Promote Nationwide Adoption of Next Generation 9-1-1 Technology**

- **The Problem:** Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1) technology provides an opportunity for the public to provide a wealth of information to Emergency Communications Centers (ECC), including text, video, and location information. This information can help local fire and EMS departments to provide better lifesaving aid to their communities. However, it will be expensive to modernize many ECCs that are working with outdated technology. As the economy begins to slow down, communities will not have the funds to make the investment into NG 9-1-1.
- **The Solution:** Congress should pass legislation to authorize \$15 billion to fund nationwide NG 9-1-1 transition.
- **The Explanation:** The IAFC supports legislation that would provide \$15 billion for federal grants for NG 9-1-1 deployment. It also would create a Public Safety Advisory Board composed of local public safety officials to provide guidance to the federal government about the rollout. The bill also would provide funding for training for ECC staff to help them sort through the information that they receive and provide valuable information to the incident commander on scene. The bill also would include a Nationwide NG 9-1-1 Cybersecurity Center to ensure the cybersecurity of the nationwide NG 9-1-1 system.
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your senators and representatives to support passage of NG 9-1-1 legislation in early 2023.

## **Eligibility in the Federal PSOB Programs for the Families of Fallen Public Safety Officers Due to Cancer**

- **The Problem:** The U.S. Department of Justice’s Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) program is designed to help the families of fallen public safety officers that died in the line of duty. Unfortunately, the program does not recognize deaths and disabilities of public safety officers from job-related cancer-causing exposures. However, studies by the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety found that firefighters face a 9% increase in cancer diagnoses and a 14% increase in cancer-related deaths, when compared to the general U.S. population
- **The Solution:** Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced bipartisan legislation, the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (H.R. 1719/S. 930), to grant eligibility for the PSOB program to the families of public safety officers that die or are disabled from cancer due to job-related exposures.
- **The Explanation:** Under H.R. 1719/S. 930, a public safety officer would have to have been exposed to “heat, radiation, or a carcinogen that is linked to an exposure-related cancer while in the course of the line of duty.” The public safety officer also would have to have served for five years as a public safety officer before the cancer diagnosis, and the diagnosis would have to occur not later than 15 years after than the last day of active service for the public safety officer.
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your senators and representatives to cosponsor and support passage of the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (H.R. 1719/S. 930).

For further information about federal legislative issues, please visit the IAFC’s Government Relations and Policy Department at (703) 273-0911 or go to [www.iafc.org/gr](http://www.iafc.org/gr). In addition, you can [follow @IAFC on Twitter](https://twitter.com/IAFC) for real-time updates and information.