



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress

January 2024

The 118th 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.
- **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. *However, they are scheduled to be terminated on September 30, 2024.* The U.S. Senate passed the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870) on April 20, which would reauthorize the FIRE and SAFER grant programs through Fiscal Year (FY) 2030. S. 870 also would delay the FIRE and SAFER grants' termination until September 30, 2032. The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology marked up a companion bill (H.R. 4090) on June 21. It would authorize the programs through FY 2028 and protect the programs through September 30, 2030. Congress approved \$360 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2023. For FY 2024, President Biden is requesting \$370 million for each program. The House passed the FY 2024 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (H.R. 4367) on September 28. The bill includes President Biden's request of \$370 million for each program. However, the Senate only proposed \$338.4 million for each program in its companion bill (S. 2625).
- **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 representatives to pass the Fire Grants and Safety Act (H.R. 4090/S. 870) to protect the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. Also, please ask your senators to reject the proposed cuts in the Senate and 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. The House companion bill (H.R. 4090) would authorize \$95 million for USFA through FY 2028.

Congress appropriated approximately \$60 million for USFA in FY 2023. For FY 2024, President Biden is proposing \$72.8 million for USFA. The House FY 2024 DHS Appropriations Act (H.R. 4367) includes \$72.8 million for USFA. However, the Senate proposed only \$59.556 million in its companion bill (S. 2625).

- The Explanation: Explain the importance of increasing USFA's budget. This increase will allow USFA to develop the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS), a new data system to replace the National Fire Incident Reporting System.
- The "Ask:": Ask your representatives to pass the Fire Grants and Safety Act (H.R. 4090/S. 870) to reauthorize USFA. Also, please ask Congress to reject the proposed cuts in the Senate and fund USFA at \$72.8 million in FY 2024 to fund the NERIS program.

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. On December 13, the Senate passed the SIREN Reauthorization Act (S. 265), introduced by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Susan Collins (R-ME), which would extend the authorization of the SIREN grant program through FY 2028. Representative David Joyce (R-OH) introduced a bipartisan House companion bill (H.R. 4646).

The Senate proposed \$11.5 million in the FY 2024 Departments of Labor, Health, and Human Services (HHS), and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (S. 2624).

- 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 representatives to co-sponsor H.R. 4646.

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 (H.R. 4274/S. 1925) 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 educate mental health professionals about 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 representatives and senators to cosponsor the HERO Act (H.R. 4274/S. 1925).

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: On May 24, the House Energy and Commerce Committee voted 50-0 to report the Spectrum Auction Reauthorization Act of 2023 (H.R. 3565). The bill would authorize \$14.8 billion to fund a nationwide NG 9-1-1 transition.
- The Explanation: The IAFC supports legislation that would provide \$14.8 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. In addition, 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 pass H.R. 3565.

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 for 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 representatives and senators to cosponsor and support passage of the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (H.R. 1719/S. 930).

Reauthorize the FirstNet Authority

- The Problem: Congress created the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) to establish a nationwide public safety broadband network. The network gives public safety both preemption and priority on their own spectrum. FirstNet has been used in numerous major disasters by public safety agencies, including active shooter incidents, wildland fires, and hurricanes. More than 27,000 public safety agencies and organizations are subscribers to FirstNet. Currently, FirstNet is scheduled to be sunset and end operations on February 22, 2027.
- The Solution: Representative Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX) introduced legislation, H.R. 3366, to authorize FirstNet permanently and remove its sunset date.
- The Explanation: If you are a subscriber to FirstNet, explain how it helps your operations during daily incidents and major disasters. Explain why it is important to have reliable communications during incidents and why it is important to have a network dedicated to public safety.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives to cosponsor and pass H.R. 3366.

Reauthorize the National Firefighter Cancer Registry

- The Problem: Cancer is a major cause of death for firefighters. According to a study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) firefighters have a 9% increase in cancer diagnoses and a 14% increase in cancer-related deaths than the public. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified the occupational exposure of firefighters as “carcinogenic to humans.”
- The Solution: The nation’s fire and emergency service requires cancer researchers and medical professionals to identify the causes of cancer in firefighters and develop ways to prevent cancer. The [National Firefighter Registry for Cancer](#) is a repository designed to collect anonymous information from firefighters. Researchers will be able to use this information to identify ways to prevent cancer in the fire and emergency service.
- The Explanation: Congress appropriated \$5.5 million for the national registry in FY 2023, and the Senate proposed the same amount in FY 2024. However, the authorization for the program expired in FY 2022. Congress needs to reauthorize funding for this program. The Firefighter Cancer Registry Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3821/S. 2119), by Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), would authorize \$5.5 million for the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer from FY 2024 through FY 2028.
- The “Ask:” Please ask your representatives and senators to cosponsor the Firefighter Cancer Registry Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3821/S. 2119).

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. In addition, you can [follow @IAFC on X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#) for real-time updates and information.