



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

*A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress*

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**August 2022**

### **The 117<sup>th</sup> Congress**

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

- **The Problem:** As fire departments continue to respond to COVID-19 cases, 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 during this pandemic. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103) appropriated \$360 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. The House and Senate both proposed \$370 million each for the FIRE and SAFER programs in FY 2023.
- **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 and senators to support at least \$370 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2023.

#### **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 fully funded to continue its critical mission.
- **The Solution:** The FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103) appropriated \$53.2 million for USFA. The House and Senate both proposed an increase to approximately \$58 million for FY 2023. However, Congress authorized \$76.49 million for USFA in FY 2023.
- **The Explanation:** Explain the importance of the USFA. USFA has played a vital role in helping fire departments during the pandemic. In addition, the National Fire Academy provides strategic and tactical education to help fire chiefs respond to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. *If you have taken NFA courses on campus or online*, explain what you learned and how it has helped you to do your job better.
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your representatives and senators to support at least \$58 million for the USFA and NFA in FY 2023.

## **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. This problem worsened due to the strain caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as stay-at-home orders eliminated the ability of fire departments to hold community-based fundraisers such as Bingo games and barbeques. As a result, these agencies are struggling even more to afford basic EMS equipment and medications. 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 2022, Congress provided \$7.5 million for the SIREN grant program. The House proposed \$10 million for the SIREN grant program in FY 2023, while the Senate proposed \$15 million.
- **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 2023.

## **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 the Surfside condominium collapse, numerous wildland fires, and hurricanes. More than 20,500 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 Val Demings (D-FL) introduced bipartisan legislation, H.R. 6768, 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. 6768.

## **Support Incentives for the Retrofit of Fire Sprinklers**

- **The Problem:** According to the USFA, the overall 10-year fire death rate increased by 3.5% between 2009 and 2018. Overall, 3,810 Americans lost their lives in 2018 due to fires. According to the NFPA, only 26% of fires occurred in home properties, including single-family homes; apartments; and multi-family housing. Nevertheless, these fires caused 75% of civilian deaths and 73% of injuries.
- **The Solution:** The installation of automatic fire sprinklers in buildings helps to reduce civilian death and injuries and property loss due to fires. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) and Senator Tina Smith (D-MN) introduced the Public Housing Fire Safety Act (H.R. 2638/S. 265) to create a \$25 million grant program to retrofit federal public housing with automatic fire sprinklers. In addition, Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) introduced the High Rise Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act (H.R. 6192/S. 3346) to change the depreciation period for the retrofit installation of fire sprinklers in high-rise buildings from over 39 years to 15 years.

- The Explanation: Explain the importance of fire sprinklers to your senators and representatives. According to the NFPA, the risk of dying in a reported home fire is 85% lower if sprinklers are present.
- The “Ask”: Please ask your representatives and senators to support the Public Housing Fire Safety Act (H.R. 2638/S. 265) and the High Rise Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act (H.R. 6192/S. 3346).

### **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. 1480/S. 2700) 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:” H.R. 1480 passed the House of Representatives, so please ask your senators to now pass the HERO Act (H.R. 1480) in the Senate.

### **Extend Federal Payments for Ambulance Service**

- The Problem: The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) provides additional 2%, 3%, and 22.6% payments for ambulance transports originating in urban, rural, and super-rural zip codes, respectively. These payments are crucial in stretching CMS’ reimbursements closer to the actual cost of providing EMS and transport services. Unless Congress acts, these payments will expire at the end of 2022.
- The Solution: Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) and Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) introduced the Protecting Access to Ground Ambulance Medical Services Act (H.R. 2454/S. 2037) to extend these important payments until January 1, 2028. Additionally, the legislation makes important changes to how CMS classifies a zip code as urban, rural, or super-rural.
- The Explanation: Despite the seemingly small percentages that these payments represent, they can add up to be a significant source of funding for fire departments. In addition, the changes to zip code classification make it harder for CMS to decrease the additional payment by moving a zip code into a more densely populated status.
- The “Ask:” Please ask your representatives and senators to cosponsor the Protecting Access to Ground Ambulance Medical Services Act (H.R. 2454/S. 2037)

## **Support Greater Authority for the U.S. Fire Administration to Prevent Fires**

- **The Problem:** Fire deaths and property loss continue to plague our nation. According to the NFPA, local fire departments responded to an estimated 1.4 million fires in 2020. These fires caused 3,500 fire deaths; 15,200 civilian injuries; and an estimated \$21.9 billion in property damage. As the Twin Parks North West fire in the Bronx demonstrated in January, America continues to face these large-scale fires and needs to take steps to prevent them.
- **The Solution:** The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) can play a greater role in preventing civilian deaths; injuries; and property loss. Through its ability to work with the nation's fire and emergency service, USFA can use a whole community approach to look at areas such as fire prevention; emergency response; code adoption and enforcement; and how to work with at-risk communities to prevent future fires.
- **The Explanation:** The Empowering the U.S. Fire Administration Act (H.R. 7077/S. 3845) would allow USFA to conduct on-site investigations of major fires to assess the cause of origin and other broader conditions surrounding the fires. The USFA could then issue a public report to state, local, and federal authorities that would discuss the particular fire and ways to prevent or better respond to similar fires. These reports could help prevent similar fires in the future. H.R. 7077 passed the House on May 11. It was considered and passed by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on August 3.
- **The "Ask:"** Please ask your Senators to pass the Empowering the U.S. Fire Administration Act (H.R. 7077/S. 3845).

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