



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

*A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress*

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**March 2021**

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

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

- **The Problem:** The economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 is reducing fire department budgets as fire departments still work to provide service to their communities during the pandemic. 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) 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260) appropriated \$360 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. An additional \$200 million was provided to each program in COVID-19 relief legislation over the past year.
- **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 \$750 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2022.

#### **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 Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-93) appropriated \$49.27 million for USFA. However, Congress authorized \$76.49 million for USFA in FY 2022.
- **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 \$76.49 million for the USFA and NFA in FY 2022.

## **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 has 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 2021, Congress provided \$5.5 million for the SIREN grant program.
- **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 \$20 million for FY 2022.

## **Improve Hazardous Materials Response Training for First Responders**

- **The Problem:** The national energy boom has focused attention on the importance of safely transporting crude oil and other hazardous materials across the country. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), the overall volume of crude oil moving by rail has quadrupled in less than a decade. Recent incidents in the transport of crude oil have demonstrated the need for local fire and emergency services to be prepared for hazmat incidents.
- **The Solution:** In FY 2015, Congress created the Assistance for Local Emergency Response Training (ALERT) grants to provide hazardous materials training for volunteer or remote emergency responders. The grant program is focused on providing training for incidents involving rail shipments of crude oil, ethanol, and other flammable liquids. The training will consist of both in-person and web-based components. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260) allows one-year funding for the ALERT grants from unused HMEP grants along with an additional \$1 million. Congress should permanently authorize the ALERT grant in the infrastructure bill to secure these benefits for local and volunteer response agencies.
- **The Explanation:** *If you have crude oil or other hazmat rail shipments in your jurisdiction*, explain how you plan and train for possible incidents. Also, explain the time commitments and expenses of planning and training for rail and hazmat incidents. Explain how federally funded, web-based, and in-person training can help your department prepare for a potential incident involving the transportation of crude oil or other hazardous materials.
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your representatives and senators to authorize PHMSA to use unspent funds under Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness (HMEP) program to fund the ALERT grants.

## **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) introduced the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome Act (HERO Act; H.R. 1480) 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, H.R. 1480 would create a registry to track suicides among first responders to identify important trends.
- The Explanation: The HERO Act takes an important 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:": Ask your representative to cosponsor the HERO Act (H.R. 1480).

### **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. With the budget cuts caused by COVID-19 social distancing orders, communities will not have the funds to make the investment into NG 9-1-1.
- The Solution: The forthcoming infrastructure bill offers a major opportunity for the federal government to provide funding to rollout NG 9-1-1 across the country. The LIFT America Act (H.R. 1848) would provide \$15 billion to fund the nationwide deployment of NG 9-1-1 technology.
- The Explanation: H.R. 1848 would provide grants to the states 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 Security Operations Center to ensure the cybersecurity of the nationwide NG 9-1-1 system.
- The "Ask:": Ask your Representatives to support the NG 9-1-1 provisions in H.R. 1848.

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