



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress

January/February 2019

The 116th Congress

Protect the FIRE/SAFER Grant Programs

- **The Problem:** 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. To date, the programs are working well to improve preparedness and response capabilities, but much more needs to be done. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) appropriated \$350 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. For FY 2019, President Trump proposes funding the FIRE and SAFER grant programs at \$344.344 million each. On June 21, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported the FY 2019 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (S. 3109), which includes \$350 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. On July 25, the House Appropriations Committee reported out its companion bill, which also included \$350 million each for the FIRE and SAFER programs.
- **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 \$405 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2019.

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

- **The Problem:** Many fire service leaders have been concerned about the level of funding that the USFA and NFA receive, and whether they will be able to fulfill their missions and respond to emerging challenges. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) appropriated \$44.397 million for USFA. Of that \$44.397 million, \$1.497 million is allocated for infrastructure improvements at the National Fire Academy. For FY 2019, President Trump is proposing \$44.993 million for USFA, which includes \$1.5 million for the National Emergency Training Center (NETC). On June 21, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported the FY 2019 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (S. 3109), which includes \$45.5 million for USFA, including \$1.5 million for infrastructure improvements at the NETC. On July 25, the House Appropriations Committee reported out its companion bill, which included approximately \$45 million, including \$1.5 million for NETC infrastructure improvements.
- **The Solution:** Because America’s fire and emergency service is critically important to national preparedness and response, it needs to have a strong voice within DHS. Also, fire programs need a consistent and high level of funding.

- The Explanation: Explain the importance of receiving training through the NFA. *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. Also, discuss why your community needs up-to-date information from the National Fire Incident Reporting System.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives and senators to support \$50 million for the USFA and NFA in FY 2019 and to reauthorize the USFA.

Requirement to Give Back Public Safety Communications Spectrum in the T-Band

- The Problem: On February 22, 2012, President Obama signed Public Law 112-96. The law requires that the Federal Communications Commission begin auctioning the public safety T-Band spectrum (470-512 MHz) by February 2021 and clear all public safety operations from the band within two years of auction close. The T-Band is a key spectrum resource allocated for land mobile communications in 11 major urban areas and the surrounding 50-mile radius of these cities of the United States. While the law provides that auction revenues can be used toward the cost of relocating public safety operations to other spectrum bands, the law is silent on identifying a new spectrum home. The National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) estimates that it will cost at least \$5.9 billion to complete this spectrum migration. In addition, at least five jurisdictions have no excess spectrum to which to migrate.
- The Solution: Congress is working on legislation to repeal the requirement that public safety organizations give back their T-Band spectrum.
- The Explanation: *If your agency’s land-mobile radio communications are on the T-Band*, explain how this requirement to migrate from the T-Band will hurt your communications. Explain why it is important for your agency to have adequate spectrum for voice communications.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives to cosponsor legislation to protect public safety communications on the T-Band.

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 struggle to afford basic EMS equipment and medications. Additionally, increasing drug shortages have significantly increased the costs of medications that are commonly provided to critically ill and injured patients.
- The Solution: The Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Grant 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. The IAFC urges Congress to provide \$20 million for the SIREN grant in FY 2020.
- 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 support funding the SIREN Act at \$20 million for FY 2020.

Federal Taxation of Volunteer Incentives

- **The Problem:** State and local governments use property tax rebates and other incentives to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. The Internal Revenue Service views these incentives as income. A previous federal law excluded any property tax benefit and up to \$360 per year of all other state and local benefits to volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel from taxable income. *This law expired at the end of 2010.*
 - **The Solution:** The Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA) will be introduced soon and would permanently reinstate the tax benefit and raise the \$360 cap to \$600.
 - **The Explanation:** Explain that taxing such incentives makes them ineffective and may hinder recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency responders. Further, point out that the number of volunteer firefighters nationwide has decreased from 880,000 in 1984 to 814,850 in 2015 according to the NFPA's *U.S. Fire Department Profile*. State and local incentives are important when recruiting and retaining volunteers who must struggle to balance their careers and the obligations of today's two-income families.
- The "Ask:"** Ask your representatives and senators to protect state and local benefits for volunteer firefighters by becoming an original cosponsor of the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act. Members of Congress can become an original cosponsor by contact the office of Representative John Larson (D-CT), Representative Mike Kelly (R-PA), Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), or Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD).

Strengthen Federal Incentives for Fire Sprinkler Retrofit Installations

- **The Problem:** Automatic fire sprinkler systems are a proven way to reduce the chances of being killed or injured in a fire as well as significantly limit damage to a building. Congress recently allowed fire sprinkler systems to qualify for deduction under Section 179 of the tax code. However, when Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (P.L. 115-97) in 2017, it contained an unintentional drafting error which prevented fire sprinkler systems from qualifying for bonus depreciation until 2027 and then qualifying for a 15-year depreciation period after 2027.
- **The Solution:** Congress must pass legislation to fix this error and allow fire sprinkler systems, and other "qualified improvement properties" (QIPs) recognized under Section 168 of the tax code, to qualify for these accelerated depreciation rates.
- **The Explanation:** When Congress passed their tax reform bill in 2017, they wanted to incentivize property owners to make their buildings safer through the installation of fire sprinkler systems and other fire alerting and suppression systems. However, the drafting error in P.L. 115-97 limits the ability of property owners to take full advantage of these incentives. There is strong bipartisan support in Congress to correct this unintentional error. However, more members of Congress need to express their support for this correction.
- **The "Ask:"** Ask your representatives and senators to incentivize the installation of fire sprinkler systems by urging Congress to fix the QIP drafting error.

For further information about federal legislative issues, please feel free to contact 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 Twitter](#) for real-time updates and information!