



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

*A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress*

May 2018

### The 115<sup>th</sup> 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.
- **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.
- **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 (i.e., by early 2023). The T-Band is a key spectrum resource allocated for land mobile communications operations in 11 major urban areas 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 IAFC estimates that it will cost \$5.9 billion to complete this spectrum migration. In addition, at least five jurisdictions have no excess spectrum to which to migrate.
- **The Solution:** The Don't Break Up the T-Band Act (H.R. 5085) would 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 H.R. 5085. Ask your senators to sponsor a companion bill to H.R. 5085.

## **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. 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 Act (SIREN Act; H.R. 5429) would establish a grant program within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide funding for procuring EMS supplies and medications, recruiting personnel, and running EMS licensure classes. Only public and non-profit fire/EMS agencies are eligible to receive funding.
- **The Explanation:** The SIREN Act would create a grant program that assists budget-challenged rural fire and EMS agencies in providing life-saving services in their communities. These grants would only be for public and non-profit agencies located in rural areas. This eligibility requirement would ensure that these funds are provided to fire and EMS agencies in need.
- **The "Ask:"** Ask your representatives to cosponsor H.R. 5429.

## **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; H.R. 1550/S. 1238) would permanently reinstate the tax benefit and raise the \$360 cap to \$600. The Retirement Enhancement and Savings Act (S. 2526/H.R. 5282) also would authorize the VRIPA for 2019.
- **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 (H.R. 1550/S. 1238) and the Retirement Enhancement and Savings Act (S. 2526/H.R. 5282).

### **The Creation of a Nationwide Voluntary Cancer Registry for Firefighters**

- The Problem: There is an overall higher risk of cancer among firefighters. Research has shown that there are significant increases in the risks of cancers in the colon, prostate, intestine, lung, bladder, kidney and other organs in firefighters. For some types of cancer, the risk relative to the general population can be 229% higher.
- The Solution: There is a need for more comprehensive research into the links between firefighting and cancer. The Firefighter Cancer Registry Act (H.R. 931/S. 382) would create a voluntary national firefighter registry. Researchers would be able to compare the information in this registry with state cancer registries to investigate what is causing the increased risk of cancer in firefighters and prevent that risk. H.R. 931 passed the House on September 12, 2017.
- The Explanation: The legislation would establish the national firefighter registry at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The information would be anonymous and submitted on a voluntary basis. Researchers that use data from this registry would have to make their research and results available to the fire and emergency service to develop personal protective equipment and tactics and procedures to mitigate the risk of cancer.
- The “Ask”: Ask your senators to pass the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act (H.R. 931/S. 382).

### **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 ALERT grants to provide hazardous materials training for volunteer or remote emergency responders. The IAFC was awarded \$2.6 million in ALERT grant funds to develop a training program in coordination with the IAFF, NVFC and the other major fire service organizations. 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 FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) did not reauthorize the ALERT grants. President Trump’s FY 2019 budget would reinstate the program.
- 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 reauthorize PHMSA to use unspent funds under the Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grants program to continue funding the ALERT grants.

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](http://www.iafc.org/gr). In addition, you can [Follow @IAFC on Twitter](#) for real-time updates and information!