



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

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November 19, 2014

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the nearly 10,000 members of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), I encourage you to support funding for federal programs that assist the nation's firefighters and EMS personnel in any legislation that will fund the federal government in 2015. The fire and emergency service responded to more than 31.6 million incidents in 2013, covering structural fires, hazardous materials incidents, wildland fires, EMS responses, and numerous other emergency response situations. Many federal programs play a vital role in ensuring that the nation's fire departments are properly trained, equipped, and prepared to meet their daily challenges and address all natural and human-made threats to our nation. As you complete work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 appropriations bills, we ask you to consider funding the following programs at the recommended levels.

Department of Homeland Security

- **U.S. Fire Administration (\$44 million):** The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) works with the nation's fire and emergency service to reduce deaths and economic losses due to fire and related emergencies. Two important programs within USFA are the National Fire Academy and the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). The IAFC is grateful for the committee's continued support for these programs, especially the continued focus on making NFIRS a comprehensive system for collecting and providing data that the fire and emergency service can use to make well-informed decisions. *The IAFC requests that the committee funds the USFA at \$44 million as included in both H.R. 4903 and S. 2534.*
- **The Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, including the SAFER grant program (\$680 million):** The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (also known as the "FIRE" grant program) and the SAFER grant program both provide necessary training, equipment and staffing for local fire departments. The FIRE grant's Fire Prevention and Safety grant program also provides funding for lifesaving fire prevention programs and research to reduce fatalities and injuries due to fire. *The IAFC thanks the committee for clearly specifying the funding for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs under a separate "Firefighter Assistance Grants" section. In addition, the IAFC requests that the committee funds the FIRE and SAFER grant programs at \$340 million each as included*

in both H.R. 4903 and S. 2534. The IAFC also appreciates the provisions in H.R. 4903 and S. 2534, which would waive selected requirements of the SAFER grant program for a final year to allow fire departments to re-hire and retain firefighters. This last year will be a transition year as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) develops the waiver process created in 15 U.S.C §2229a.

- **State and Local Grant Programs (\$1.5 billion):** Over the past few years, FEMA has continued to try to consolidate the homeland security preparedness grant programs into one National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP). While we appreciate that FEMA has proposed legislation to implement its NPGP concept, we believe that the legislation has a number of problems, which will have to be addressed by the authorizing committees of jurisdiction if they should decide to consider the legislative proposal. *The IAFC appreciates the language in both H.R. 4903 and S. 2534, which would prohibit FEMA from enacting the NPGP without the passage of authorizing legislation. We urge the committee to include these provisions in the final legislation funding the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in FY 2015. In addition, we request that the committee continue to appropriate \$1.5 billion for the State and Local Programs account, with \$467 million for the State Homeland Security Grant Program and \$600 million for the Urban Areas Security Initiative.*
- **Urban Search and Rescue System (\$35.18 million):** The nation's Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) system provides the nation's search and rescue response capability during both national and international tragedies. For FY 2015, the Administration proposed reducing the US&R system's funding to \$27.513 million, which is the funding level included in H.R. 4903. *The IAFC recommends that the committee maintain the current level of funding for the US&R system (\$35.18 million) as is included in S. 2534. We are concerned by the proposed cuts to funding for this national asset, especially since FEMA's request would result in an estimated \$350,000 cut to each team.*
- **Office of Health Affairs (\$127.958 million):** The DHS Office of Health Affairs (OHA) serves as the DHS' principal office for all medical and public health issues. Through its Workforce Health and Medical Support Division, the OHA works with local first responders to improve national preparedness for responding to pandemics and other large-scale public health disasters. The recent concern about an Ebola outbreak in the U.S. heightens the importance of this agency. *While the Administration proposed reducing the OHA's budget to \$125.767 million, the IAFC recommends that the committee continue to support the funding level of \$127.958 million found in H.R. 4903. The OHA is examining issues relating to the distribution of med-kits to first responders and their families, and we recommend that the committee consider allocating adequate funding for this project and whatever exigencies may arise from Ebola preparedness efforts.*
- **Legislation to allow FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to be used for post-wildland fire flooding:** After the fire response agencies have a wildland fire under control, communities are still at risk from the after-effects of the fires. One major threat is that rains may result in local flash-flooding, because there are no vegetation or erosion barriers to prevent the flooding. During the committee mark-up to S. 2534, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted to accept an amendment by Senator Tom Udall (D-NM)

to allow states to use funding from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to take steps to prevent flash-flooding after wildland fires. *The IAFC requests that the committee accept this amendment in the final FY 2015 DHS appropriations legislation. This one-year provision will allow states and local jurisdictions to work with FEMA to pilot test the use of HMGP grants to protect their communities from flooding after wildland fires.*

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is responsible for regulating the operation of the 2.6 million miles of pipeline and 1 million daily shipments of hazardous materials. PHMSA also plays an important role in training first responders to respond to incidents that may occur during the transportation of hazardous materials by pipeline, road, rail, air or sea.

- **PHMSA's Emergency Preparedness Grants (\$28.3 million):** PHMSA's Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grants, Supplemental Public Sector Training Grants, and Hazardous Materials Instructor Training provide crucial training to first responders. Both H.R. 4745 and S. 2438 would provide PHMSA's budget request of \$28.3 million. S. 2438 also would provide PHMSA with the authority to use \$4.974 million in prior year carryover and recaptured funding to develop a web-based hazardous materials response training curriculum for emergency responders, including response activities for crude oil, ethanol and other flammable liquids by rail. The training curriculum would be developed in coordination with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and be consistent with National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) standards. S. 2438 also would provide a minimum of \$3.5 million to train public sector emergency response personnel in communities on or near rail lines that transport a significant volume of high-risk energy commodities or toxic inhalation hazards.

The IAFC supports appropriating \$28.3 million for PHMSA's emergency preparedness grants. We also request that the final FY 2015 PHMSA funding legislation accept the funding proposed by the Senate for web-based training and training for emergency response personnel located in communities on or near rail lines. This training should be consistent with the requirements of the Operations level of OSHA 1910.120 and NFPA 472 to ensure that it meets the requisite federal and voluntary consensus standards, and uses a blended approach utilizing both web-based and practical, in-person classroom training. In addition, training funded and provided by PHMSA and FRA should focus on improving the emergency response capability of both rural and volunteer fire departments along hazardous materials transportation routes. While not being a full replacement for hands-on training, web-based training can be cost-effective and provide flexibility to reach a larger number of first responders than traditional in-person training.

Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

In 2013, more than 47,000 wildland fires burned more than 4.3 million acres. Additionally, urbanization and increased development led to an above-average number of structures -- more than 2,135 structures, including more than 1,090 residences -- that were destroyed by these

wildfires. For these reasons, we have prioritized the following federal programs and are requesting the following levels of funding:

- **Wildland Fire Management:** Current federal budgeting practices frequently fail to fund fully the federal government’s wildland fire suppression responsibilities under the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As a result of not being appropriated the correct funding levels, the USDA and DOI are forced to rely upon a dangerous practice, known as “fire borrowing,” in which funds are removed from non-suppression accounts and transferred to suppression accounts within the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and DOI. The IAFC strongly believes that the current system of transferring hazardous fuels removal funds to fire suppression accounts is unsustainable and can ultimately lead to overgrown lands and larger fires. Unfortunately, the House proposal for this account in the DOI and USDA contained a budgeting method which would not curb the use of fire borrowing.

The IAFC supports the Senate’s FY 2015 Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chairman’s Recommendation which allows for funding of federal wildland fire operations in a manner which would allow both for efficient fire suppression and preserve the ability of the USFS to remove hazardous fuels and undertake other projects to improve the health of our nation’s public lands. However, the IAFC firmly recommends that every dollar saved through this proposal should be directed solely to state and local preparedness programs, forest health programs, and hazardous fuels removal projects. Alternate uses of these savings on programs unrelated to forest health and community preparedness will likely result in the continuation of fire borrowing.

- **Hazardous Fuels Programs (DOI: \$146 million; USDA: \$358.6 million):** The Hazardous Fuels Programs at the USFS and the DOI are the primary source of funding used to reduce the risk of wildland fires on federal lands. In FY 2013, the USFS treated more than 2.6 million acres — with more than 1.7 million of those acres within the wildland urban interface (WUI). Bureaus at the DOI treated 643,184 acres in FY 2013 — more than 73% of which were in the WUI. *The IAFC supports the funding level and mechanism described in the Senate’s FY 2015 Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chairman’s Recommendation.*
- **State Fire Assistance (USDA: \$78 million):** The State Fire Assistance (SFA) program is an important tool that helps states prepare for local wildland firefighting by building enhanced capacity and mitigating the effects of wildland fires. The SFA program requires matching local funds and, in FY 2013, directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on nearly 130,000 acres and provided assistance to 12,041 communities as they prepared for (and mitigated the risk of) wildland fire. The USDA proposed reducing SFA funding to \$76 million in FY 2015. *While the IAFC urges you to provide \$86 million, the FY 2012 funding level, for this important program, the IAFC supports the House and Senate proposed funding levels of \$78 million for FY 2015.*
- **Volunteer Fire Assistance (USDA: \$13 million):** The Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant program provides matching funds to volunteer fire departments protecting communities with 10,000 or fewer residents in order to purchase equipment and training

for wildland fire suppression. The USFS reports that approximately 97% of wildland fires are extinguished on initial attack by local fire departments— saving the federal government millions of dollars by preventing the growth of small wildland fires into large fires. Maintaining and properly funding the VFA program supports local fire departments and can help the USFS meet its target and save tax dollars. *While the IAFC would like to see the VFA's funding level return to its FY 2010 level of \$16 million, the IAFC supports the House and Senate proposals to fund the VFA program at \$13 million for FY 2015.*

We remain grateful for your continued funding of federal programs that support the fire and emergency service, and ask you to consider our recommendations. During today's challenging economic climate, all of these programs are vitally important to the efforts of local firefighters and EMS personnel as they prepare for the all-hazards incidents that threaten their communities. If you have any questions about these recommendations or require further information, please contact Ken LaSala, the IAFC's director of government relations and policy, at 703.273.9815 x347 or klasala@iafc.org.

Sincerely,



Fire Chief G. Keith Bryant
President and Chairman of the Board

- c: The Honorable John Carter, Chairman, Homeland Security Subcommittee
- The Honorable David Price, Ranking Member, Homeland Security Subcommittee
- The Honorable Ken Calvert, Chairman, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
- The Honorable Jim Moran, Ranking Member, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
- The Honorable Tom Latham, Chairman, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
- The Honorable Ed Pastor, Ranking Member, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

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