

**CONGRESSIONAL FIRE SERVICES INSTITUTE / FIRE APPARATUS MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION /  
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MANUFACTURERS AND SERVICES ASSOCIATION /  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ARSON INVESTIGATORS / INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS /  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS / INTERNATIONAL FIRE SERVICE TRAINING ASSOCIATION /  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF FIRE SERVICE INSTRUCTORS /  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FIRE MARSHALS / NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION /  
NATIONAL VOLUNTEER FIRE COUNCIL / NORTH AMERICAN FIRE TRAINING DIRECTORS**

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**Outside Witness Testimony:** Submitted to the Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security

**Regarding:** Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs – Firefighter assistance grants, U.S. Fire Administration, Urban Search and Rescue System

April 11, 2018

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Capito and Ranking Member Tester,

On behalf of the nation's fire and emergency services, we write to urge your continued support for programs that enhance our nation's readiness and emergency response capabilities: the Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and the Urban Search and Rescue Response System (US&R).

The AFG and SAFER grant programs are imperative to addressing the needs of more than one million fire and emergency services personnel, while providing an economic stimulus to American businesses. As you begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 appropriations process, we encourage you to fund these programs at \$810 million evenly divided between the two programs. This funding level represents a restoration to the Fiscal Year 2011 funding levels and will assist local fire departments in meeting the increasing costs of equipment, training and personnel.

Congress created AFG and SAFER to address the baseline needs of our nation's fire and emergency services. These two highly successful programs help ensure that our nation's 30,000 fire departments have the necessary training, equipment, and staffing to respond to over 33 million emergency calls annually and to continue to reduce community risk. Every community relies on firefighters to respond to a variety of emergency situations, including structure fires, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, technical rescues, and wildland/urban interface fires. Both the AFG and SAFER grant programs improve the response capabilities in each of these emergency response areas, and provide funding for crucial fire prevention and safety programs targeted toward high-risk populations.

Unfortunately, the past five years have seen a steep increase in the cost of some of the most common and sought-after firefighting equipment, much of which is critical to lower the alarming rate of cancer in the fire service. An analysis by industry experts estimates that from 2011 to the present, the cost of protective clothing has increased by an estimated 11.4%. During the same period, the cost of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) increased by an estimated 15%. These cost increases were due in part to the increased costs of raw materials and to necessary changes to equipment standards that improved firefighter safety. Additionally, there has also been a sharp increase in the cost of firefighting apparatus. The cost of pumper trucks, which make up approximately 60% of the apparatus market, has increased by an estimated 14.6% due in large part to price increases for materials and labor.

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The AFG and SAFER grant programs provide the means to enhance preparedness and response capabilities nationwide to all types of hazards, as well as support fire prevention and education programs. These capabilities are squarely in the federal interest and justify continued federal investments.

Another issue we bring to your attention is funding for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA). USFA plays an important role at the national level, ensuring that the fire service is prepared to respond to all hazards. Each year, USFA provides training to approximately 100,000 fire and emergency service personnel through the National Fire Academy (NFA). It also collects important data and conducts research to reduce the threat of fire and other dangers in local communities. Unfortunately, over the past decade, USFA's budget has been reduced by approximately 25% percent. A lack of sufficient funding jeopardizes the agency's ability to aid state fire training systems, reduces technical support for the data collection, and threatens the support of the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend. We ask Congress to fund USFA at \$50 million to assist the agency in carrying out its vital mission.

Lastly, we request your support for the Urban Search and Rescue Response System (US&R). As the nation's only self-sufficient, all-hazards, ready-response force, US&R is essential to our nation's homeland security. Given its crucial importance, we are extremely concerned with the program's consistent underfunding. The average cost to maintain a US&R team exceeds \$2 million. Although Congress has funded US&R at \$35.18 million for the past several years, this amount only covers a portion of the necessary costs, leaving local governments responsible for filling the gap and, thus, impairing local public safety. We urge Congress to increase funding for the program to \$50 million in Fiscal Year 2019.

We remain grateful for your continued leadership in ensuring that America's fire and emergency services are prepared to protect the public from all hazards – both natural and manmade. As you continue developing legislation to fund these programs for Fiscal Year 2019, we urge you to consider our recommendations to ensure that our nation's first responders can continue to protect and serve their communities safely and effectively.

Sincerely,

Congressional Fire Services Institute  
Fire Apparatus Manufacturers' Association  
Fire and Emergency Manufacturers and Services Association  
International Association of Arson Investigators  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
International Association of Fire Fighters  
International Fire Service Training Association  
International Society of Fire Service Instructors  
National Association of State Fire Marshals  
National Fire Protection Association  
National Volunteer Fire Council  
North American Fire Training Directors

CC: The Honorable Richard Shelby; Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Patrick Leahy; Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee