

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

Outside Witness Testimony: Submitted to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security by Michaela Campbell, Director of Government Affairs for the Congressional Fire Services Institute, on behalf of the undersigned organizations
Regarding: Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs – Firefighter assistance grants, U.S. Fire Administration, Urban Search and Rescue Response System

March 3, 2020

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair, Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Chairman 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).

I. AFG and SAFER Grant Programs

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) 2021 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 FY2011 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 several years have seen a steep increase in the cost of some of the most common and sought-after firefighting equipment. The most recent analysis from industry experts estimates that since 2011, the cost of protective clothing has increased by around 11 percent. During the same period, the cost of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) increased by about 15 percent and the cost of pumper trucks—which make up approximately 60% of the apparatus market—increased by more than 14 percent. Even today, costs are still continuing to increase.

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.

II. U.S. Fire Administration

Another issue we bring to your attention is funding for 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 remained relatively stagnant and well below the authorized level.

It is a positive sign that the Administration has requested an increased funding level for the agency in its FY2021 budget proposal. We are also pleased that the budget funds the state fire training grants, which help states deliver NFA-developed courses. However, our organizations note that the funding increases in the budget are allocated for personnel and facilities management. Meanwhile, the state fire training grants are funded from the curriculum development and delivery account, which receives no new funding in the budget and was reduced by \$500,000 in FY 2020. Therefore, our organizations request USFA be funded at \$50.7 million, to fully fund the President's Budget Request—including the state fire training grants—without forcing USFA to shift funds away from curriculum development and delivery.

III. Urban Search and Rescue Response System

Lastly, we request your support for US&R funding. 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. Unfortunately, recent appropriations have only covered 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 \$50.7 million in FY2021.

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 FY2021, 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,

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CC: The Honorable Richard Shelby; Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patrick Leahy; Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee