

**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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February 25, 2016

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee  
H-305, The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Carter  
Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Homeland Security  
B-307 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
2330 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Rogers, Lowey, Carter and Roybal-Allard:

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

The FIRE 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) 2017 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 and labor.

Congress created FIRE 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 30 million emergency calls annually and to continue to reduce community risk. Every community across the country relies on our firefighters to respond to a variety of emergency situations, including structure fires, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, and wildland/urban interface fires. Both the FIRE 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.

The FIRE and SAFER programs have been extremely effective. According to the Third Needs Assessment of the U.S Fire Service, published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), significant progress has been made in the readiness of fire departments across the country since the creation of the FIRE and SAFER programs. The NFPA study found:

- 51% of all fire departments lack enough portable radios to equip all responders on a shift (down from 77% in 2001);
- 51% of all fire departments cannot equip all firefighters on a shift with self-contained breathing apparatus (down from 70% in 2001);
- 46% of all fire departments have not formally trained all their personnel involved in structural firefighting (down from 55% in 2001);
- 48% of all fire departments responsible for emergency medical service (EMS) have not formally trained all their personnel (down from 54% in 2001);
- 20% of fire departments protecting populations of at least 500,000 have fewer than four firefighters assigned to an engine (down from 30% in 2001);
- 26% of departments protecting populations between 250,000 and 499,999 have fewer than four firefighters assigned to an engine (down from 41% in 2001).
- 35% of departments do not provide a school fire safety education program based on a national model curriculum (down from 47% in 2001).
- 52% of departments do not provide a free smoke alarm distribution program (down from 69% in 2001).

Summarizing the report, NFPA stated, “In all areas emphasized by the FIRE and SAFER grants, there is ample evidence of impact from the grants **but also considerable residual need still to be addressed**, even for needs that have seen considerable need reduction in the past decade.”

Unfortunately, the past five years have seen a steep increase in the cost of some of the most common and sought-after firefighting equipment. An analysis by industry experts estimates that from 2011 to present, the cost of protective clothing has increased by an estimated 11.4%. During the same time 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.

Since 2011, 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% increase due in large part to price increases for materials and labor.

The FIRE 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.

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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 one million 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. This trend needs to stop. Continued cuts to USFA's budget will eliminate assistance for state fire training systems, reduce technical support for the data collection, and end support for the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend. We ask that Congress appropriate \$45.6 million for USFA, restoring funding for the agency to the Fiscal Year 2011 level.

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 recent cuts to the program. The average cost to maintain a US&R team exceeds \$2 million. Although Congress funded US&R at \$35.18 million in FY 2016, this amount only covers a portion of the necessary costs, leaving local governments responsible for filling the gap and, thus, impairing local public safety. At a minimum, we urge Congress to fund the program at \$50 million for Fiscal Year 2017.

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 2017, 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