

**Congressional Fire Services Institute · International Association of Fire Chiefs
National Association of Counties · National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
National Association of Towns and Townships · National Volunteer Fire Council**

July 30, 2018

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson:

On behalf of the Congressional Fire Services Institute, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Association of Counties, the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, the National Association of Towns and Townships, and the National Volunteer Fire Council, we urge you to support inclusion of the amended Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs Act (Section 12628 of the Senate-passed version of H.R. 2) in the final negotiated version of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (H.R. 2). Rural, government and nonprofit, emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in our nation's rural areas are in dire need of additional funding sources. Section 12628 maintains strong bipartisan support and re-establishes an important mechanism to save lives in rural communities.

As you know, fire and EMS agencies serve an important function in delivering pre-hospital medical care to ill and injured patients in their communities. The missions of these agencies are all the more important when you consider the lack of primary medical care available in communities and the potential delays in patient care due to long transportation distances to a hospital. Firefighters and EMS personnel thus serve as a critical part of the healthcare continuum by stabilizing patients and providing initial medical treatment for their conditions. In many rural communities, patients with chronic health conditions may have a better relationship with their local fire and EMS agency than their own doctor.

The limited tax base in rural communities severely limits the financial support available for governmental and nonprofit departments. Government and nonprofit fire and EMS agencies routinely faces challenges and limitations in delivering pre-hospital care to critically ill and injured patients. Chronically low, or often non-existent, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements further compound this problem. Nevertheless, these agencies must maintain constant readiness to serve their communities. Any delays in providing initial care can be detrimental to a patient's health when combined with long distances to a hospital. The opioid epidemic is a prime example of such cases where rapid initial treatment with naloxone is key to a patient's survival.

No federal program currently exists specifically to support rural EMS operations. Section 12628 of the Senate-passed version of H.R. 2 addresses the lack of federal support for rural EMS agencies by establishing the SIREN grants within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These grants will assist rural governmental and nonprofit fire and EMS agencies to

purchase the equipment, obtain the medications, and provide the training that is necessary to continue saving lives in their communities.

Our organizations applaud the Senate for including the SIREN Act as Section 12628 of H.R. 2. We strongly encourage you to maintain this vital component to H.R. 2 and help firefighters and EMS personnel save lives in their communities. While the Senate-passed Manager's amendment included a 25 percent matching requirement, we fully support the commitment among Senate leaders to lower the matching requirement to 10 percent in the final bill. An increased non-federal match will make it harder for many of the organizations this bill aims to support and could limit participation where it's most needed.

Funding from the SIREN Act will undoubtedly save lives and improve EMS in rural communities across the country. Our organizations look forward to continuing to work with you to strengthen rural fire and EMS agencies.

Sincerely,

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