



March 2, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

On behalf of the nation's fire and emergency services, we are writing to request your support of our nation's emergency medical services (EMS) personnel in the wake of the alarming transmissions of the COVID-19 virus. Specifically, we seek your commitment to ensuring EMS personnel have sufficient resources and training to respond to suspected cases of COVID-19.

In the coming months it is highly likely that individuals infected with COVID-19 will seek assistance from emergency response personnel, including fire fighters cross-trained as emergency medical technicians and paramedics. It is crucial we ensure all EMS personnel have sufficient equipment and supplies to respond to what may, in all likelihood, exceed those presently available through commercial channels.

At a minimum, responding departments must provide sufficient personal protective equipment for all responders, including N95 respirators and fit-test kits, goggles, fluid-resistant gowns, and gloves. As we learn more about the disease, additional protections may be required.

Additionally, as we learn more about the virus, departments may need specialized training to limit the spread of the disease and provide the highest quality care for patients. Responders need current and continually updated resources to recognize a potential infection, institute necessary precautions to limit the spread of the disease, and utilize proper disinfection procedures. Departments in some areas may also need to establish highly-trained, specialized infectious disease response teams.

We, as individual organizations continue to educate our members on the importance of reviewing current infectious disease policies, procedures, and guidelines in preparation for caring for and transporting a potentially infected patient. However, we are concerned that EMS may be overlooked as the nation prepares the larger public health community. As a key component of the public health system, it is imperative that all levels of government – federal, state and local – ensure fire departments and EMS agencies have the proper resources to safely perform their duties. To that end, as you develop emergency supplemental appropriations legislation we ask that EMS be included as an eligible recipient for funds made available to support the public health system generally.

Protecting EMS personnel is critical to ensuring the public safety, as citizens will continue to rely upon fire departments and EMS providers to deliver emergency medical services to the community.

Sincerely,



Harold A. Schaitberger
General President
International Association of Fire Fighters



Fire Chief Gary Ludwig
President and Chairman of the Board
International Association of Fire Chiefs



Dr. William Jenaway
President
Congressional Fire Services Institute



Steven. W. Hirsch
Chair
National Volunteer Fire Council

cc: The Honorable Roy Blunt
The Honorable Patty Murray