



May 13, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
H-307 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
2006 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, and Ranking Member Fleischmann:

On behalf of the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), I am writing to express opposition to Section 10402 of the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, which waives statutory protections ensuring that volunteer and smaller fire departments receive an equitable share of funding under the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program for the \$355 million appropriated for AFG in FY 2020 and the \$500 million included in the HEROES Act for AFG. Specifically, I am concerned that the bill would allow for unlimited award amounts, eliminate the statutory requirement that FEMA conduct peer review and rely on input from peer reviewers in making award decisions, and eliminate the requirement that at least 25 percent of appropriated funds be awarded to volunteer fire departments. Waiving these protections would result in the transfer of tens of millions of dollars in grant funding from volunteer fire departments to fire departments with paid staff that already receive the lion's share of assistance through the AFG and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs.

Volunteer fire departments are struggling with the impact of COVID-19 just as much as their big-city counterparts. Social distancing has disrupted fundraising efforts for thousands of smaller fire departments, even as the economic downturn is reducing local tax support. I am enclosing a document outlining the numerous challenges that our members face. Volunteer fire departments need the AFG program now more than ever. I urge you to remove the above-mentioned waivers of statutory protections in the HEROES Act before the bill is voted on by the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

Steven W. Hirsch, Chair

Enclosure

CC: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives