



National Fire Service Organizations Express Outrage at Cuts to Grants to Local Fire Departments U.S. Senate Urged to Restore Funding to FIRE and SAFER Grant Programs

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the National Volunteer Fire Council, the Congressional Fire Services Institute, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, and the National Fire Protection Association all joined together in a unified voice to express outrage at recently proposed cuts to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) programs. Our organizations call upon Congress to restore funding to these programs.

The AFG program (popularly known as the “FIRE Grant program”) funds matching grants to help local fire departments meet their basic training and equipment needs. It also funds important public fire prevention programs and lifesaving research to prevent death and injury to local firefighters and the public. The SAFER grant program provides funding to both hire career firefighters and recruit volunteer firefighters. Both programs are managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

On Thursday, July 27, the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee voted to report legislation to cut funding to these vital programs. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill would cut the programs each from \$360 million in FY 2023 to \$338 million in FY 2024, a reduction of \$22 million. By contrast, the House version of the FY 2024 DHS Appropriations bill (H.R. 4367) would maintain funding for these programs at \$360 million in FY 2024.

Our organizations call upon Congress to restore funding to these programs. Local fire and EMS departments face an increasing number of risks from which they must protect the public. Whether it be extreme heat, a spike in fentanyl overdoses, a pandemic, wildland fires, hazmat incidents, or fires caused by lithium-ion batteries – the local fire department is on scene to provide lifesaving aid. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, fire and EMS departments are facing personnel shortfalls due to early retirements and a lack of new recruits. In addition, the supply chain crisis has caused the cost of fire and EMS apparatus and equipment to escalate above the capabilities of many fire and EMS departments. The AFG and SAFER grant programs have been commended over the years as effective methods of helping local fire and EMS departments meet the needs and challenges of their communities.

The AFG and SAFER grant programs provide lifelines to fire and EMS departments across the nation that are caught between increasing costs and an acceleration of new missions. Every year fire departments submit applications totaling approximately \$2 billion for the AFG program and approximately \$1 - \$2 billion for the SAFER grant program.

Instead of cutting these highly effective programs, we urge Congress to restore their funding. We also ask members of the fire and emergency service community to take action and contact their Senators and Representatives to protect the AFG and SAFER grant programs.

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