



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress

November 2018

The 115th Congress

Protect the FIRE/SAFER Grant Programs

- **The Problem:** Many fire departments across the country cannot afford the equipment, training, and staffing necessary to meet a baseline level of readiness. This situation puts firefighters and their communities in danger.
- **The Solution:** The FIRE and SAFER grant programs augment local funding and provide much needed assistance to meet these needs. To date, the programs are working well to improve preparedness and response capabilities, but much more needs to be done. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) appropriated \$350 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. For FY 2019, President Trump proposes funding the FIRE and SAFER grant programs at \$344.344 million each. On June 21, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported the FY 2019 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (S. 3109), which includes \$350 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. On July 25, the House Appropriations Committee reported out its companion bill, which also included \$350 million each for the FIRE and SAFER programs.
- **The Explanation:** *If you have received a grant under the FIRE or SAFER grant programs, explain how you used the money and how it has improved your ability to serve your community in response to all hazards. If you have not received a grant under these programs, explain how you could use that grant money. Give a specific example of how a FIRE or SAFER grant has helped or could help you serve your community.*
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your representatives and senators to support at least \$405 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2019.

Funding for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and National Fire Academy (NFA)

- **The Problem:** Many fire service leaders have been concerned about the level of funding that the USFA and NFA receive, and whether they will be able to fulfill their missions and respond to emerging challenges. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 115-141) appropriated \$44.397 million for USFA. Of that \$44.397 million, \$1.497 million is allocated for infrastructure improvements at the National Fire Academy. For FY 2019, President Trump is proposing \$44.993 million for USFA, which includes \$1.5 million for the National Emergency Training Center (NETC). On June 21, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported the FY 2019 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (S. 3109), which includes \$45.5 million for USFA, including \$1.5 million for infrastructure improvements at the NETC. On July 25, the House Appropriations Committee reported out its companion bill, which included approximately \$45 million, including \$1.5 million for NETC infrastructure improvements.
- **The Solution:** Because America’s fire and emergency service is critically important to national preparedness and response, it needs to have a strong voice within DHS. Also, fire programs need a consistent and high level of funding.

- The Explanation: Explain the importance of receiving training through the NFA. *If you have taken NFA courses on campus or online*, explain what you learned and how it has helped you to do your job better. Also, discuss why your community needs up-to-date information from the National Fire Incident Reporting System.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives and senators to support \$50 million for the USFA and NFA in FY 2019 and to reauthorize the USFA.

Requirement to Give Back Public Safety Communications Spectrum in the T-Band

- The Problem: On February 22, 2012, President Obama signed Public Law 112-96. The law requires that the Federal Communications Commission begin auctioning the public safety T-Band spectrum (470-512 MHz) by February 2021 and clear all public safety operations from the band within two years of auction close. The T-Band is a key spectrum resource allocated for land mobile communications in 11 major urban areas and the surrounding 50-mile radius of these cities of the United States. While the law provides that auction revenues can be used toward the cost of relocating public safety operations to other spectrum bands, the law is silent on identifying a new spectrum home. The National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) estimates that it will cost at least \$5.9 billion to complete this spectrum migration. In addition, at least five jurisdictions have no excess spectrum to which to migrate.
- The Solution: The Don’t Break Up the T-Band Act (H.R. 5085/S. 3347) would repeal the requirement that public safety organizations give back their T-Band spectrum. H.R. 5085 has 19 cosponsors and S. 3347 has 4 cosponsors.
- The Explanation: *If your agency’s land-mobile radio communications are on the T-Band*, explain how this requirement to migrate from the T-Band will hurt your communications. Explain why it is important for your agency to have adequate spectrum for voice communications.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives to cosponsor H.R. 5085 and S. 3347.

EMS Grants for Rural Fire/EMS Agencies

- The Problem: Rural fire and EMS agencies often face uniquely difficult budgetary challenges as they may lack the tax base to provide strong funding. As a result, these agencies struggle to afford basic EMS equipment and medications. Additionally, increasing drug shortages have significantly increased the costs of medications that are commonly provided to critically ill and injured patients.
- The Solution: The Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs Act (SIREN Act; H.R. 5429/S. 2830) would establish a grant program within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide funding for procuring EMS supplies and medications, recruiting personnel, and running EMS licensure classes. Only public and non-profit fire/EMS agencies are eligible to receive funding. The SIREN Act was included in the Senate-passed version of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill, H.R. 2). However, Congress still needs to retain the SIREN Act in the final version of the Farm Bill.
- The Explanation: The SIREN Act would create a grant program that assists budget-challenged rural fire and EMS agencies in providing life-saving services in their communities. These grants would only be for public and non-profit agencies located in rural areas. This eligibility requirement would ensure that these funds are provided to fire and EMS agencies in need.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives and senators to support retaining the SIREN Act (Section 12628 of the Senate-passed Farm Bill) in the final version of the Farm Bill (H.R. 2).

Federal Taxation of Volunteer Incentives

- **The Problem:** State and local governments use property tax rebates and other incentives to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. The Internal Revenue Service views these incentives as income. A previous federal law excluded any property tax benefit and up to \$360 per year of all other state and local benefits to volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel from taxable income. *This law expired at the end of 2010.*
- **The Solution:** The Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA; H.R. 1550/S. 1238) would permanently reinstate the tax benefit and raise the \$360 cap to \$600. The Retirement Enhancement and Savings Act (S. 2526) also would authorize the VRIPA for 2019.
- **The Explanation:** Explain that taxing such incentives makes them ineffective and may hinder recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency responders. Further, point out that the number of volunteer firefighters nationwide has decreased from 880,000 in 1984 to 814,850 in 2015 according to the NFPA's *U.S. Fire Department Profile*. State and local incentives are important when recruiting and retaining volunteers who must struggle to balance their careers and the obligations of today's two-income families.
The "Ask:" Ask your representatives and senators to protect state and local benefits for volunteer firefighters by becoming an original cosponsor of the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (H.R. 1550/S. 1238) and to make sure reauthorization of the VRIPA is included in any end-of-year tax legislation that Congress may consider.

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