



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

*A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress*

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**June 2024**

### **The 118<sup>th</sup> Congress**

#### **Protect the FIRE/SAFER Grant Programs**

- **The Problem:** As fire departments continue to respond to a variety of increased threats, the strain on fire department equipment and personnel remains high. As equipment and overtime/backfill costs escalate, 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. The programs help fire departments meet their basic needs as the economy slows down. *However, they are scheduled to be terminated on September 30, 2024.* The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870) on May 8, 2024. The House-passed bill would authorize \$750 million each for the FIRE and SAFER programs through FY 2028 and protect the programs from termination through September 30, 2030. Even though S. 870 passed the Senate last year, it must now pass the bill again with the House's amendments. Congress approved \$324 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2024. *This is a 10% cut to both programs.* For FY 2025, President Biden is requesting \$385 million for each program.
- **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 senators to pass the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870) to protect the FIRE and SAFER grant programs. Also, please ask Congress to fund the AFG and SAFER programs at President Biden's request of \$385 million each.

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

- **The Problem:** The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) provides necessary training and policy resources to local fire departments. Currently, it is developing the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) to replace the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). In addition, USFA also is developing new programs to support fire-based EMS. It is important that USFA be funded to continue its critical mission.
- **The Solution:** The House-passed Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870) would authorize \$95 million for USFA through FY 2028. Congress appropriated more than \$71 million for USFA in FY 2024. For FY 2025, President Biden is proposing \$78.6 million for USFA, which includes funding for upgrades at the National Fire Academy (NFA).

- The Explanation: Explain the importance of increasing USFA’s budget and how the implementation of the new NERIS will help fire departments obtain real-time information about fires in their region and across the nation.
- The “Ask:” Ask your senators to pass the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870) to reauthorize USFA. Also, please ask Congress to fund the USFA at President Biden’s requested \$78.6 million in FY 2024 to fund the NERIS program, maintain the NFA’s buildings, and upgrade its information technology infrastructure.

### **Develop Federal Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries and Micromobility Devices**

- The Problem: The nation has witnessed an increase in deadly fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices. The lithium-ion batteries can become overcharged or damaged and create explosive deadly fires that put both firefighters and the public at risk.
- The Solution: Representative Ritchie Torres (D-NY) and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced the Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act (H.R. 1797/S. 1008). This bill would require the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to issue safety standards on lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices. The House passed H.R. 1797 on May 15 by a vote of 378-34. The Senate must then pass the bill without amendment in order for it to become law.
- The Explanation: By directing the CPSC to develop safety standards for lithium-ion batteries and micromobility devices, Congress can ensure that these devices are fire-safe. In addition, local jurisdictions can remove older devices that do not meet the standards.
- The “Ask:” Please ask your senators to pass the Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act (H.R. 1797).

### **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 and often receive incomplete reimbursements for the cost of providing emergency medical care. As a result, these agencies are struggling even more to afford basic EMS equipment and medication due to increased inflation. Additionally, shortages impacting medications and personal protective equipment have exacerbated these financial challenges by making these essential EMS tools more expensive.
- The Solution: The Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) grant program was established in 2018 to provide funding for procuring EMS supplies, recruiting personnel, and running EMS licensure classes. Only public and non-profit fire/EMS agencies are eligible to receive funding. Congress appropriated \$11.5 million for the SIREN grant program in FY 2024, but the program needs to be reauthorized. On December 13, the Senate passed the SIREN Reauthorization Act (S. 265), introduced by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Susan Collins (R-ME), which would extend the authorization of the SIREN grant program through FY 2028. Representative David Joyce (R-OH) introduced a bipartisan House companion bill (H.R. 4646), which was passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee on March 20. It is the same as S. 265.
- The Explanation: The SIREN grant assists budget-challenged rural fire and EMS agencies in providing life-saving services in their communities. These grants are for public and non-profit agencies located in rural areas. This eligibility requirement ensures that these funds are provided to fire and EMS agencies in need.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives and senators to fund the SIREN grants at \$15 million for FY 2025. Also, please ask your representatives to pass S. 265, so that it can be signed into law this year.

## **Support Housing Benefits for Volunteer First Responders**

- **The Problem:** Eighty-five percent of the nation’s fire departments are staffed by all- or mostly-volunteer personnel. However, the number of volunteer firefighters across the nation has declined from approximately 898,000 volunteers in 1984 to 676,900 volunteers in 2023. Potential volunteers say that the work and family commitments present obstacles to volunteering with their local fire department.
- **The Solution:** Senate Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Representative Andrew Garbarino (R-NY) introduced the Volunteer First Responder Housing Act (H.R. 4787/S. 1988) to create a new recruitment and retention incentive for volunteer firefighters. The bill would assist volunteer firefighters that have served for two years in their community and have met the minimum requirements for active membership or provided at least 200 hours of service per year.
- **The Explanation:** The bill would allow qualified volunteer first responders to participate in the Good Neighbor Next Door Program to receive a 50% discount on the list price of their home in designated areas. Also, qualified volunteers in rural areas would be allowed to deduct \$18,000 from their income to qualify for the Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program, which provides a 90% loan guarantee for homes in rural areas. These programs are designed to provide recruitment and retention incentives for volunteer firefighters by helping them become single family homeowners.
- **The “Ask:”** Please ask your representatives and senators to cosponsor the Volunteer First Responder Housing Act (H.R. 4787/S. 1988).

## **Eligibility in the Federal PSOB Programs for the Families of Fallen Public Safety Officers Due to Cancer**

- **The Problem:** The U.S. Department of Justice’s Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) program is designed to help the families of fallen public safety officers that died in the line of duty. Unfortunately, the program does not recognize deaths and disabilities of public safety officers from job-related cancer-causing exposures. However, studies by the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety found that firefighters face a 9% increase in cancer diagnoses and a 14% increase in cancer-related deaths, when compared to the general U.S. population.
- **The Solution:** Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced bipartisan legislation, the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (H.R. 1719/S. 930), to grant eligibility for the PSOB program to the families of public safety officers that die or are disabled from cancer due to job-related exposures.
- **The Explanation:** Under H.R. 1719/S. 930, a public safety officer would have to have been exposed to “heat, radiation, or a carcinogen that is linked to an exposure-related cancer while in the course of the line of duty.” The public safety officer also would have to have served for five years as a public safety officer before the cancer diagnosis, and the diagnosis would have to occur not later than 15 years after than the last day of active service for the public safety officer.
- **The “Ask:”** Ask your representatives and senators to cosponsor and support passage of the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (H.R. 1719/S. 930).

## **Reauthorize the FirstNet Authority**

- **The Problem:** Congress created the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) to establish a nationwide public safety broadband network. The network gives public safety both preemption and priority on their own spectrum. FirstNet has been used in numerous major disasters by public safety agencies, including active shooter incidents, wildland fires, and hurricanes. More than 27,500 public safety agencies and organizations are subscribers to FirstNet. Currently, FirstNet is scheduled to be sunset and end operations on February 22, 2027.

- The Solution: Representative Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX) introduced legislation, H.R. 3366, to authorize FirstNet permanently and remove its sunset date.
- The Explanation: If you are a subscriber to FirstNet, explain how it helps your operations during daily incidents and major disasters. Explain why it is important to have reliable communications during incidents and why it is important to have a network dedicated to public safety.
- The “Ask:” Ask your representatives to cosponsor and pass H.R. 3366.

### **Reauthorize the National Firefighter Cancer Registry**

- The Problem: Cancer is a major cause of death for firefighters. According to a study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), firefighters have a 9% increase in cancer diagnoses and a 14% increase in cancer-related deaths than the public. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified the occupational exposure of firefighters as “carcinogenic to humans.”
- The Solution: The nation’s fire and emergency service requires cancer researchers and medical professionals to identify the causes of cancer in firefighters and develop ways to prevent cancer. The [National Firefighter Registry for Cancer](#) is a repository designed to collect anonymous information from firefighters. Researchers will be able to use this information to identify ways to prevent cancer in the fire and emergency service.
- The Explanation: Congress appropriated \$5.5 million for the national registry in FY 2024. However, the authorization for the program expired in FY 2022. Congress needs to reauthorize funding for this program. The Firefighter Cancer Registry Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3821/S. 2119), by Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), would authorize \$5.5 million for the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer from FY 2024 through FY 2028. The House passed H.R. 3821 on March 6.
- The “Ask:” Please ask your senators to pass the Firefighter Cancer Registry Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3821).

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