

**CONGRESSIONAL FIRE SERVICES INSTITUTE/INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE  
CHIEFS/INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS/NATIONAL VOLUNTEER FIRE COUNCIL**

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November 7, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-128, The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee  
304 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Subject: Ebola Hearing – Outside Witness Testimony

Dear Senator Mikulski and Senator Shelby,

On behalf of the nation's fire and emergency services, we thank you for holding this important hearing on the federal government's response to the recent Ebola outbreak in the United States and West Africa. It is important for our nation's policy makers – both in Congress and within the Administration - to keep in mind the unique needs and challenges facing America's first responders and commit to ensuring firefighters, emergency medical services (EMS), and hazardous materials personnel have sufficient training and resources to respond to suspected cases of Ebola.

As you know, the first confirmed case of Ebola in North America was reported in Dallas, Texas, where the 9-1-1 system was used to treat and transport the patient to the hospital. Although the three responding paramedics, members of the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department, have thankfully shown no sign of illness, they were placed under continuous medical observation to monitor their conditions. Responses to other suspected, but later proven negative, Ebola patients have identified additional areas of concern including the fact that a Virginia hospital which refused admission to an ambulance crew transporting a suspected Ebola patient.

Despite positive developments over the past few weeks, the crisis is not over. The threat from the continued spread of the disease remains real, and we must be prepared for it. It is highly likely that more individuals infected with Ebola will seek assistance from emergency response personnel in the coming months. As the vast majority of EMS in the United States is delivered by career and volunteer firefighters who have been cross-trained as emergency medical technicians and paramedics, it is crucial that we ensure such personnel are properly trained and equipped to respond to such a scenario. Most of the federal government's efforts to protect health care workers assume sterile and clean hospital-based settings. EMS personnel work in chaotic, dangerous and uncontrollable environments. Special precautions are needed for EMS personnel that go beyond what is needed for hospital workers.

The President's recent emergency supplemental appropriations request includes funds for the purchase of, and training on, PPE for hospitals. While we appreciate the President's proposal mentions the need for state and local preparedness, unfortunately the supplemental funding request does not direct any funding specifically to our nation's fire and EMS agencies. It is unrealistic to assume that CDC, which has never funded emergency response agencies and has no mechanism to do so, would be willing or able to

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provide fire department with the training and equipment they need. Any supplemental appropriations must include a clear directive and mechanism to fund emergency first responder preparedness.

At a minimum, responding departments must provide sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) for all responders. As the recent transmissions have made clear, workers who come into contact with an Ebola patient -- especially one who is releasing bodily fluids through vomiting or diarrhea -- must cover all exposed skin. Firefighters and EMS personnel should, at a minimum, have fluid- impermeable full-body PPE, including face shields, hoods, gloves, and N95 or higher respirators. As we learn more about the disease, additional protections also may be required.

Fire departments also must provide specialized training to all responders to limit the spread of the disease and provide the highest quality care for patients. Responders must learn to recognize a potential Ebola patient, establish necessary precautions to limit the spread of the disease, and utilize proper disinfection procedures.

It is estimated that we can provide equipment and training for firefighters in America's 50 largest cities for approximately \$13.5 million. However, we need to ensure first responders in our suburban and rural communities are also adequately trained and equipped. We estimate that for an additional \$80 million, Congress can guarantee there is sufficient funding for training and equipment for first responders in communities both large and small. Congress should ensure this funding reaches local fire departments in the quickest and most efficient way possible.

Additionally, many protective items are on back order. It is essential that the Administration work in a cooperative fashion with manufacturers to ensure the appropriate equipment is produced as quickly as possible. While there is a critical need for training and PPE for first responders, it is imperative that fire departments also have the equipment and training to drape and seal ambulances before use to provide safe and proper care and transport for Ebola patients. It is also important for fire department personnel to have the equipment and training to decontaminate effectively vehicles in the event of a potential exposure.

Each of our organizations continue to educate our respective members on the importance of reviewing current infectious disease policies, procedures and guidelines in preparation for a potential Ebola patient; yet 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 training and resources to safely perform their duties. It is important for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Homeland Security, and the United States Fire Administration to communicate directly with local fire departments and EMS providers to ensure they have access to timely and pertinent information.

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This is not simply a matter of safety for EMS and hazardous materials personnel. Protecting first responders is critical to ensuring public safety as citizens will continue to rely upon fire departments to deliver emergency medical services to their communities.

On behalf of America's fire and emergency services, we thank you for your attention to these important public health issues and your continued support of all first responders.

Sincerely,

Congressional Fire Services Institute  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
International Association of Fire Fighters  
National Volunteer Fire Council