



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS LEGISLATIVE HOT SHEET

A Guide for Talking with Members of Congress

November 2016

The 114th 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) 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113) appropriated \$345 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs, **a \$5 million increase for each program**. For FY 2017, the Obama Administration proposed cutting the FIRE and SAFER grants to \$335 million each and focusing them on terrorism preparedness. The House Appropriations Committee would appropriate \$345 million for each program, while the Senate Appropriations Committee would appropriate \$340 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 representatives and senators to support at least \$345 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2017 and to reauthorize these programs.

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) 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113) appropriated \$44 million for USFA. The FY 2017 budget request would cut USFA funding to \$42.3 million. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees both propose appropriating \$44 million for USFA in FY 2017.
- **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 \$44 million for the USFA and NFA in FY 2017.

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:** Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA, S. 609) to reinstate the tax benefit and raise the \$360 cap to \$600 through the end of the 2018 tax year. Representative John Larson (D-CT) introduced an identical bill in the House (H.R. 2752).
- **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 786,150 in 2013 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 cosponsoring the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (H.R. 2752/S. 609). The Senate Finance Committee recently included VRIPA in a larger bill, the Retirement Enhancement and Savings Act of 2016. Ask you senators to pass this legislation as soon as possible.

The Creation of a Nationwide Voluntary Cancer Registry for Firefighters

- **The Problem:** There is an overall higher risk of cancer among firefighters. Research has shown that there are significant increases in the risks of cancers in the colon, prostate, intestine, lung, bladder, kidney and other organs in firefighters. For some types of cancer, the risk relative to the general population can be 229% higher.
- **The Solution:** There is a need for more comprehensive research into the links between firefighting and cancer. Representatives Richard Hanna (R-NY) and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) introduced the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act (H.R. 4625) to create a voluntary national cancer registry. This legislation would create a voluntary, nationwide cancer registry to allow researchers to investigate what is causing the increased risk of cancer in firefighters and prevent that risk. Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) introduced Senate companion legislation (S. 2799).
- **The Explanation:** The legislation would establish the national cancer registry at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The information would be anonymous and submitted on a voluntary basis. Researchers that use data from this registry would have to make their research and results available to the fire and emergency service to develop personal protective equipment and tactics and procedures to mitigate the risk of cancer.
- **The "Ask":** Ask your representatives and senators to cosponsor the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act (H.R. 4625/S. 2799).

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 by February 2021 and clear all public safety operations from the band within two years of auction close (i.e., by early 2023). The T-Band (470-512 MHz) is a key spectrum resource allocated for land mobile communications operations in 11 major urban areas 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 IAFC estimates that it will cost \$5.9 billion to complete this spectrum migration. In addition, at least five jurisdictions have no excess spectrum to which to migrate.

- **The Solution:** Ultimately, the best solution is to change the law and allow the 11 urban areas to remain in the T-Band spectrum until the nationwide public safety broadband network being developed by FirstNet can support mission-critical voice communications as part of its interoperable network.
- **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 its voice communications.
- **The "Ask:"** Ask your representatives and senators to re-examine the requirement that public safety agencies vacate the T-Band spectrum and consider the findings of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council.

Protecting Access to Emergency Medications

- **The Problem:** Fire departments and EMS agencies regularly rely upon "standing orders" from their medical directors to permit paramedics and other advanced life support (ALS) providers to administer medications to patients experiencing certain medical emergencies. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is currently developing regulations which may prohibit fire and EMS agencies from relying upon "standing orders" when administering medications which fall under DEA scheduling. These new regulations could make it significantly harder for EMS agencies to administer commonly utilized medications such as epinephrine and fentanyl. Any delay in delivering these important medications could delay care for patients experiencing cardiac arrest, mental health emergencies, extreme pain, or other conditions.
- **The Solution:** Congress should pass the Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act of 2016 (H.R. 4365/S.2932). This legislation will preserve the ability of fire departments to rely upon standing orders when administering medication to patients. Additionally, this legislation would permit fire departments to file a single registration directly with the DEA rather than the current system which forces fire departments to indirectly register through their medical directors and declare every location where controlled substances are maintained by the agency. This legislation currently has 126 cosponsors in the House and 7 cosponsors in the Senate.
- **The Explanation:** Controlled substances play an important role in the provision of pre-hospital emergency medical care. If fire and EMS departments are prohibited from using standing orders, then EMS personnel will need to consult a physician for each individual administration of medication to a patient. This process may cause severe delays in patient care, particularly in rural areas where there is already a recognized shortage of physicians. This legislation would also ease the administrative burden which forced fire and EMS departments to maintain many different DEA registrations for each fire station and vehicle carrying ALS medications.
- **The "Ask:"** Ask your representatives and senators to cosponsor the Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act of 2016 (H.R. 4365/S. 2932). The House Committee on Energy and Commerce recently approved H.R. 4365. Encourage your representatives to ask for a Floor vote on H.R. 4365.

Improve Hazardous Materials Response Training for First Responders

- **The Problem:** The national energy boom has focused attention on the importance of safely transporting crude oil and other hazardous materials across the country. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), the overall volume of crude oil moving by rail has quadrupled in less than a decade. Recent incidents in the transport of crude oil have demonstrated the need for local fire and emergency services to be prepared for hazmat incidents.
- **The Solution:** In FY 2015, Congress created the ALERT grants to provide hazardous materials training for volunteer or remote emergency responders. The IAFC was awarded \$2.6 million in ALERT grant funds to develop a training program in coordination with the IAFF, NVFC and the other major fire service organizations. The grant program is focused on providing training for incidents involving rail shipments of crude oil, ethanol, and other flammable liquids. The training will consist of both in-person and web-based components. The FY 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113) reauthorized PHMSA

to use unspent funds under the Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grants program to continue funding the ALERT grants. President Obama's FY 2017 budget request includes a proposal to extend the ALERT grant program through FY 2017. The Senate version of the FY 2017 Departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Act (H.R. 2577) includes provisions that would reauthorize the ALERT grants for FY 2017.

- The Explanation: *If you have crude oil or other hazmat rail shipments in your jurisdiction*, explain how you plan and train for possible incidents. Also, explain the time commitments and expenses of planning and training for rail and hazmat incidents. Explain how federally-funded, web-based and in-person training can help your department prepare for a potential incident involving the transportation of crude oil or other hazardous materials.
- The "Ask:" Ask your representatives and senators to continue to support funding for the ALERT grants in H.R. 2577.

For further information about federal legislative issues, please feel free to contact the IAFC's Government Relations and Policy Department at (703) 273-0911 or go to www.iafc.org/gr. In addition, you can [Follow @IAFC on Twitter](#) for real-time updates and information!