



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

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November 10, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

On behalf of the 11,000+ members of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), I encourage you to support federal programs that assist the nation's firefighters and EMS personnel. The fire and emergency service responded to more than 31 million calls in 2013, covering structural fires, hazardous materials incidents, wildland fires, EMS calls, and numerous other emergency response situations. Many federal programs play a vital role in ensuring that the nation's fire departments are properly trained, equipped, and prepared to meet their daily challenges and address all natural and human-made threats to our nation. As you consider legislation to fund the federal government in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, we ask you to consider funding the following programs at the recommended levels:

Department of Homeland Security Appropriations

- **U.S. Fire Administration (\$44 million):** The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) works with the nation's fire and emergency service to reduce deaths and economic losses due to fire and related emergencies. The USFA's National Fire Academy (NFA) is the nation's premier fire service leadership educational institution, and annually trains more than 105,000 students. For FY 2015, Congress agreed to appropriate \$44 million for the USFA. For FY 2016, the Administration proposed \$41.582 million. We are concerned that this proposed cut will eliminate the State Fire Training Grant program, which would restrict USFA's ability to assist state fire training academies with their educational missions.

Instead of cutting funding to USFA, we ask that you consider maintain the agency's funding at its FY 2015 level of \$44 million, as proposed in the House and Senate version of the FY 2016 Homeland Security Appropriations bill (H.R. 3128 and S. 1619, respectively). This funding would protect the State Fire Training Grant program, and allow USFA to begin to enact the following initiatives:

- Improve NFA's distance learning program by converting existing curricula into an on-line format.

- Make necessary capital improvements at NFA and the National Emergency Training Center, including upgrading the sewage system and overhauling student dormitories.
- Improve funding for NFA contract instructors.
- Make necessary upgrades to the National Fire Incident Reporting System.

We believe that it is important to maintain funding for USFA, so that it will have the necessary resources to perform its mission. The IAFC requests that you fund USFA at its FY 2015 funding level of \$44 million.

- **The Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, including the SAFER Program (\$680 million):** The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program provide needed assistance directly to local fire departments through a merit-based peer review process. The AFG program allows fire departments to acquire the equipment and training necessary to protect their jurisdictions as well as provide lifesaving fire prevention programs to their constituents. The SAFER grant program assists local fire departments in meeting nationally-recognized staffing requirements for career, volunteer, and combination departments. These programs provide fiscal responsibility by requiring a local match and ensuring that local jurisdictions maintain their fire departments' funding levels as a condition of the grants. For FY 2015, Congress agreed to appropriate \$340 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs.

For FY 2016, the Administration requested \$335 million for each program. The Administration also proposed eliminating the separate account for "Firefighter Assistance Grants" and moving the program under the "State and Local Programs" account, which could make it easier for FEMA to transfer funds out of the AFG program and into other programs. Also, the Administration proposed continuing to fund the administrative costs for the AFG program out of FEMA's "Salaries and Expenses" account.

As the committee considers funding for the AFG and SAFER grant programs, we ask that you consider maintaining funding for these programs at their FY 2015 funding level of \$340 million each, as proposed in H.R. 3128 and S. 1619. Since 2011, the costs of fire equipment, apparatus and staffing have increased. For example, increases in the costs of raw materials and additional testing requirements forced an approximate 11% increase in the cost of protective clothing. For the same time period, the cost of self-contained breathing apparatus has increased by 15% due to changes in the standards to improve firefighter safety. In addition, the cost of pumpers has increased by more than 24% due to new regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency and material and labor costs. Also, the personnel cost to local jurisdictions for firefighters has increased: from 2009-2013; the total personnel expenditures per fire department employee has increased by more than 13%. We are grateful for the committee's efforts to protect funding for the AFG and SAFER grant programs. These proposed increases will address the escalating costs for fire equipment and apparatus.

Because of the continued challenges facing local budgets and the need to sustain our nation's emergency response capability, the IAFC urges you to maintain funding for each

program at the FY 2015 level of \$340 million. Also, we encourage you to continue your practice of funding the AFG grants through a separate “Firefighter Assistance Grants” account in the appropriations bill. In addition, we request that you continue to allocate the AFG’s administrative costs from the FEMA’s “Salaries and Expenses” account.

- **State and Local Grant Programs (\$1.5 billion):** For FY 2015, Congress agreed to appropriate \$1.5 billion for the “State and Local Programs” account. We were very grateful for the fact that the law appropriated specific funding levels for FEMA’s homeland security preparedness grants, including \$467 million for the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) and \$600 million for the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI).

For FY 2016, the Administration reiterated its proposal to consolidate the 16 preparedness grant programs, including the SHSGP and UASI programs, into one new National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP). We continue to have concerns about the lack of details for parts of the NPGP proposal and with the overall philosophy of expanding the states’ control of grant funding at the expense of local jurisdictions. Local governments have the best understanding of the vulnerabilities in their jurisdictions and the emergency response capabilities that they have to protect their citizens. We applaud the committee for withholding implementation of the NPGP program until the grant reform issue has been considered by the appropriate authorizing committees.

For FY 2016, we ask that the committee consider sustaining the FY 2015 level of funding for the “State and Local Programs” account, and appropriate \$467 million for the State Homeland Security Grant Program and \$600 million for the Urban Areas Security Initiative, as proposed in H.R. 3128 and S. 1619. We also recommend that the committee allow FEMA to decide the appropriate number of UASI jurisdictions based on the agency’s analysis of the relative risk of terrorism faced by the nation’s 100 most populous metropolitan statistical areas.

- **Please do not support the amendment by Representative Kevin Yoder to prevent “sanctuary cities” from receiving funding from FEMA’s State and Local Programs account.** During the mark-up of H.R. 3128, the House Appropriations Committee approved an amendment by Representative Kevin Yoder that would prohibit “sanctuary cities” from receiving grant programs funded by FEMA’s “State and Local Programs” account. We are concerned that adoption of the Yoder amendment in the conference report would weaken the nation’s preparedness for future acts of terrorism.

Grants funded by FEMA’s “State and Local Programs” account play a major role in supporting state and local preparedness efforts. For example, UASI funds have been used in the National Capital Region to fund intelligence fusion center operations; upgrade state and local bomb squad capabilities; purchase 1,200 portable radios for local/regional deployment during a major incident; develop regional texting alert systems for citizen notification; purchase regional mass casualty support units; and improve the response to an incident inside the Washington area’s Metro system. Other jurisdictions depend on UASI grants to fund hazardous materials teams and fusion centers. The list of UASI cities includes New York City, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, which are jurisdictions that have passed local ordinances that fall under the definition of the term “sanctuary city” and have been the target of major terrorist plots.

While the IAFC has no position on the issue of “sanctuary cities,” we are concerned that the Yoder amendment will strip away funding for necessary capabilities that are used for protection, preparedness, response, and recovery operations. We ask that the committee not include it in the conference report for the FY 2016 DHS appropriations.

- **Urban Search and Rescue System (\$35.18 million):** The nation’s Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) system provides a necessary national search and rescue response capability during both national and international tragedies. For FY 2015, Congress agreed to appropriate \$35.18 million for the US&R system. For FY 2016, the Administration only proposed \$27.513 million. The IAFC’s concern is that this proposed cut will require a reduction of \$350,000 for each team, and undermine one of the nation’s premier emergency response capabilities.

In light of the fact that the average cost to maintain a US&R team is approximately \$1.6 million per year, and that many US&R host jurisdictions continue to face local budgetary challenges in just maintaining basic emergency response capabilities, the IAFC requests that you consider maintaining the FY 2015 level of \$35.18 million for the US&R system in FY 2016, as proposed in H.R. 3128 and S. 1619.

- **Office of Health Affairs (\$125.216 million):** The Office of Health Affairs (OHA) serves as the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) principal office for all medical and public health issues. The OHS leads DHS’ work in preparing and securing the nation from human-made and natural biological and other medical-related disasters. The OHA, through its Health Threats Resilience Division, operates programs such as BioWatch and the National Biosurveillance Integration Center, which continuously monitor regions throughout the nation to detect releases of aerosolized biological agents and identify trends in human and animal health data to provide early warning of potential epidemics or human-made medical emergencies. The OHA, through its Workforce Health and Medical Support Division, also works to improve preparedness among first responders for responding to pandemics and other large-scale public health disasters. This year, we believe that OHA must remain funded to begin important programs, such as a voluntary anthrax vaccine program for first responders. The Administration proposed reducing OHA’s funding to approximately \$124 million in FY 2016. For FY 2015, OHA was appropriated \$129.4 million. H.R. 3128 would appropriate \$125.216 million for OHA in FY 2016, while S. 1619 would appropriate \$122.924 million.

In light of the important mission that OHA plays in preparing the nation for a bioterrorism incident, the IAFC urges you to fund the OHA at the House proposed level of \$125.216 million for OHA in FY 2016

Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations

In 2014, more than 63,000 wildland fires burned more than 3.6 million acres. Additionally, urbanization and increased development in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) led to an above-average number of structures that were destroyed by these wildfires. For these reasons, we have prioritized the following federal programs and are requesting the following levels of funding:

- Wildland Fire Suppression Funding Reform:** Due to the costs of wildland fire suppression, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Interior (DOI) utilize a dangerous practice known as “fire borrowing.” Under this practice, funds are transferred from non-suppression accounts, such as hazardous fuels removal, to suppression accounts. Congress should fund wildland fire suppression in a responsible manner which preserves the ability of the USDA and DOI to complete fire prevention and preparedness programs. The IAFC believes any successful proposal must :

 - 1) Fully fund 100% of the rolling ten-year average of wildland fire suppression costs at the USDA and DOI.
 - 2) Fund any expenses above 100% of the rolling ten-year average through an adjustment to the disaster assistance cap.
 - 3) Directly re-invest all savings into programs to support community preparedness and wildland fire prevention and mitigation.
 - 4) Prohibit fire borrowing.
- Hazardous Fuels Programs (DOI: \$170 million; USDA: \$479 million):** The Hazardous Fuels Programs at the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the DOI are the primary source of funding used to reduce the risk of wildland fires on federal lands. In FY 2014, the USFS treated more than 2.5 million acres — with more than 1.7 million of those acres within the WUI. Bureaus at the DOI treated approximately 900,000 acres in FY 2014 — more than 73% of which were in the WUI. The Administration’s FY 2016 budget continues to recommend that these funds target projects in WUI communities.

The IAFC supports prioritizing hazardous fuels treatments in WUI areas, and urges you to concur with the Administration’s proposal of \$479 million for USDA for FY 2016. Additionally, the IAFC urges you to reject the Administration’s FY 2016 funding level of \$148 million for the DOI, and maintain the Senate’s proposed FY 2016 funding level of \$170 million.

- State Fire Assistance (USDA: \$78 million):** The State Fire Assistance (SFA) program is an important tool that helps states prepare for local wildland firefighting by building enhanced capacity and mitigating the effects of wildland fires. The SFA program requires matching local funds and, in FY 2014, directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on approximately 111,000 acres and provided assistance to more than 13,000 communities as they prepared for (and mitigated the risk of) wildland fire. The Administration and both House and Senate appropriations bills proposed SFA funding at \$78 million in FY 2016.

The IAFC supports the Administration, House, and Senate proposals to fund SFA at \$78 million for FY 2016.

- Volunteer Fire Assistance (USDA: \$14 million):** The Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant program provides matching funds to volunteer fire departments protecting communities with 10,000 or fewer residents to purchase equipment and training for wildland fire suppression. A local fire department’s ability to suppress wildland fires during the initial phase can save the federal government hundreds of millions of dollars. The USFS reports that local fire departments provide initial attack on nearly 80% of

wildland fires – saving the federal government millions of dollars by preventing the growth of small wildland fires into large fires. Maintaining and properly funding the VFA program supports local fire departments and can help the USFS meet its target and save tax dollars. In FY 2014, VFA grants were used to train more than 16,000 firefighters and purchase, rehabilitate, or maintain \$6.1 million in equipment. The Administration requested \$13 million for VFA in FY 2016. In July, the House unanimously adopted an amendment (H. Amdt. 564) to the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2016 (H.R. 2822) to increase funding for VFA to \$14 million in FY 2016.

As you develop FY 2016 appropriations legislation, the IAFC asks that you reject the Administration's proposal of only \$13 million, and provide \$14 million, the amount which was unanimously adopted by the House in July.

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is responsible for regulating the operation of the 2.6 million miles of pipeline and more than 1 million daily shipments of hazardous materials. PHMSA also plays an important role in training first responders to respond to incidents that may occur during the transportation of hazardous materials by rail, pipeline, road, air or sea.

- **Provide Funding for PHMSA's ALERT Grant Program:** The national energy boom has focused attention on the importance of safely transporting high-volume flammable liquid such as crude oil and other hazardous materials across the country. According to PHMSA, the overall volume of crude oil moving by rail has quadrupled in less than a decade. As recent incidents in Quebec, North Dakota, Virginia, and West Virginia demonstrated, accidents can happen and local fire and emergency services must have the necessary training and equipment to respond to these incidents.

In order to address this issue, the committee included provisions in the FY 2015 Consolidated and Further Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-235) that direct PHMSA to use prior-year carryovers from its Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness (HMEP) grant program to develop web-based training to plan and respond to hazardous materials incidents. This training is aimed at communities with rail lines that transport a significant volume of high-risk energy commodities or toxic inhalation hazards, including crude oil, ethanol, and other flammable liquids, along with their neighbors that will provide mutual aid assistance. The training must be consistent with both the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) *Standard for Competence of Responders to Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction Incidents* (NFPA 472) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) standard for *Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response* (29 CFR 1910.120).

The IAFC advocated for the provisions in P.L. 113-235 and its accompanying report. We support the combination of web-based and in-person training for local fire departments to ensure that they can respond to hazmat incidents. Web-based training can reach a majority of the firefighters and other emergency responders that must be prepared to respond to a crude oil incident. Because there are little transportation costs, it is much

more cost-effective to reach a wide population of local first responders through web-based training.

The Congressional direction in P.L. 113-235 resulted in the creation of the Assistance for Local Emergency Response Training (ALERT) grant program at PHMSA. In September, PHMSA awarded \$5.9 million in ALERT grants to provide hazardous materials training to volunteer or remote emergency responders. The Senate included report language authorizing the ALERT grants for FY 2016.

For FY 2016, the IAFC supports the continuation of the approach adopted in P.L. 113-235, which would use past years' HMEP carry-over funding for web-based and in-person training for emergency response personnel located in communities on or near rail lines. This approach is both cost-effective and allows the necessary flexibility to reach the large number of the first responders that must be prepared to respond to a high-volume flammable liquid incident. In addition, training funded and provided by PHMSA (and the Federal Railroad Administration) should focus on improving the emergency response capability of both rural and volunteer fire departments along hazmat transportation routes. The Senate appropriations bill included the language in P.L. 113-235 for FY 2016. We request that the House recede in conference to the Senate and agree to include this provision for FY 2016.

We remain grateful for your continued funding of federal programs that support the fire and emergency service, and ask you to consider our recommendations. These programs are vitally important to the efforts of local firefighters and EMS personnel as they prepare for the all-hazards incidents that threaten their communities. If you have any questions about these recommendations or require further information, please contact Ken LaSala, the IAFC's director of government relations and policy, at 703.273.9815 x347 or klasala@iafc.org.

Sincerely,



Fire Chief Rhoda Mae Kerr, EFO, CFO, MPA
President and Chair of the Board
President and Chairman of the Board

- c: The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman, Homeland Security Subcommittee
- The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Homeland Security Subcommittee
- The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
- The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
- The Honorable Susan Collins, Chairman, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
- The Honorable Jack Reed, Ranking Member, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

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