



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

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March 22, 2016

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 emergency medical services (EMS) personnel. The fire and emergency service responded to more than 29 million incidents 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 begin to work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 appropriations bills, we ask you to consider funding the following programs at the recommended levels:

Department of Homeland Security Appropriations

- **U.S. Fire Administration (\$45.6 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 2016, Congress agreed to appropriate \$44 million for USFA. For FY 2017, 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. In addition, the proposed cuts would reduce funding for the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and USFA's support for the annual National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) memorial ceremony.

Instead of cutting funding to USFA, we ask that you consider restoring the agency's funding to its FY 2011 level of \$45.6 million. This funding would protect the State Fire Training Grant program. It also would allow USFA to continue to upgrade and support NFIRS. Finally, it is important to point out that USFA's support for NFFF is integral to holding a successful ceremony in October for the families of fallen firefighters. The increased funding

also would support course development and greater use of online learning technology at NFA.

While we realize that we are requesting increased funding compared to last year's appropriation, we believe that this increase will improve USFA's ability to perform its mission. The IAFC requests that you restore USFA to the FY 2011 funding level of \$45.6 million. Also, we ask that you continue to fund USFA through a separate account instead of consolidating it into a "Federal Assistance" account.

- **The Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, including the SAFER Program (\$810 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 2016, Congress agreed to appropriate \$345 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs.

For FY 2017, the Administration requested \$335 million for each program. The Administration also proposed eliminating the separate account for "Firefighter Assistance Grants" and consolidating it into a larger "Federal Assistance" account. This change could make it easier for FEMA to transfer funds out of the AFG program and into other programs.

As the committee considers funding for the AFG and SAFER grant programs, we ask that you consider restoring funding for these programs to their FY 2011 funding level of \$405 million each. 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 approximately 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 improvements in firefighter safety standards. In addition, the cost of pumpers has increased by more than 14% due to increased 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 restore funding for each program to the FY 2011 level of \$405 million per program. 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 allocate the AFG's administrative costs from FEMA's "Operations and Support" account as you previously allocated these expenses from FEMA's "Salaries and Expenses" account.

- **State and Local Grant Programs (\$1.5 billion):** For FY 2016, 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 2017, the Administration proposed draconian cuts to FEMA's homeland security preparedness programs. For example, the SHSGP program would be cut by more than half to \$267 million and the UASI program would be cut by 45% to \$330 million. These programs play an important role in supporting the nation's preparedness and response system. Major metropolitan areas use UASI funding to support fusion center operations; develop mass casualty and other specialized response capabilities; and build interoperable communications networks. SHSGP funds are used to support training; exercises; and statewide mutual aid networks. Due to previous years' funding cuts, these grant programs are being used to maintain existing capabilities.

It is important to recognize that the terrorist threat has evolved. State and local jurisdictions now have to prepare for large-scale, coordinated catastrophic incidents; complex, coordinated attacks by teams of terrorists; and lone wolf incidents involving active shooter-style tactics. As the threats expand, it is important that federal grant funding be sustained to address them.

For FY 2017, we ask that the committee sustain the FY 2016 level of funding for the "State and Local Programs" account, and appropriate specific funding levels for the grant programs authorized in the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-53) and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-295), including the State Homeland Security Grant program and the Urban Areas Security Initiative. 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.

- **Urban Search and Rescue System (\$50 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 2016, Congress agreed to appropriate \$35.18 million for the US&R system. For FY 2017, the Administration only proposed \$27.5 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 appropriating \$50 million for the US&R system in FY 2017.

- **Support Efforts to Develop a Voluntary Anthrax Vaccine Program for First Responders:** As was demonstrated during the anthrax attack on the United States Capitol and media outlets in 2001, there is a credible threat of a weaponized anthrax attack within the United States. In order to ensure that there are adequate resources to respond to such an attack, it is important that first responders be inoculated with anthrax vaccines. There are anthrax vaccines currently in production and available as part of the Strategic National Stockpile. However, in the case of an anthrax attack, it would take too long to distribute the vaccine from the stockpile to local first responders to inoculate them in time.

The IAFC supports efforts to alleviate this problem by establishing a voluntary anthrax vaccine program at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Affairs (OHA). This program would include an adequate safeguard system to make sure that volunteers are educated about the benefits and risks of the vaccine, so that they could make informed decisions. The First Responder Anthrax Preparedness Act (H.R. 1300/S. 1915) passed the House and has been passed by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. The IAFC asks that the committee fund OHA's efforts to develop a voluntary vaccine program.

The IAFC urges you to appropriate funding to establish a voluntary anthrax vaccine program for first responders at OHA.

- **Protect Funding for the Office of Emergency Communications (\$34.2 million):** The IAFC is concerned that a proposal to reorganize the National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD) will hurt the operations of the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC), which currently is located within the NPPD's Cybersecurity and Communications organization. OEC is essential to public safety, because it is the only federal program devoted entirely to assist local and state governments' public safety communications. Part of OEC's function is to assist with developing the Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs). Additionally, OEC is responsible for the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP), which serves as the planning structure for the state- and national-level communications operability planning. Developed in partnership with the public safety community, NECP is helping jurisdictions nationwide to develop procedures and training; utilize technology; and engage in joint planning and coordination to improve the ability of first responders to communicate during an emergency. Furthermore, OEC provides essential technical assistance to state and local agencies to help them implement best practices for new technologies. It also develops the grant guidance for federal communications-related grant programs, and runs SAFECOM, a comprehensive outreach and stakeholder engagement program.

SAFECOM is a vital partnership between public safety and OEC. Even though the federal government has begun an effort to develop a nationwide public safety broadband network, local public safety organizations will continue to rely on land mobile radios for communications, because the current broadband technology does not yet meet the technical requirements for mission-critical voice communications.

The IAFC recommends that the OEC continue to be funded at \$34.2 million. In addition, we believe that this office's funding must be transparent, so that it remains accountable to its stakeholders in the public safety community. We also ask that OEC maintain its separate funding line in NPPD.

Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations

In 2015, more than 68,000 wildland fires burned more than 10.1 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 U.S. Department of the 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. We are concerned that this practice is cannibalizing important wildland fire prevention programs, which will only result in increased future fire suppression costs.

The IAFC believes Congress should fund 100% of the rolling ten-year average of wildland fire suppression costs and permit any costs above this level to be funded by a discretionary budget cap adjustment. Additionally, the IAFC believes fire borrowing should be banned and that every dollar saved through funding reform should be directly reinvested in state and local preparedness programs, forest health programs, and hazardous fuels removal.

- **Hazardous Fuels Programs (DOI: \$170 million; USDA: \$384.1 million):** The Hazardous Fuels Programs at DOI and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) are the primary sources of funding used to reduce the risk of wildland fires on federal lands. In FY 2015, the USFS treated more than 2.3 million acres. Assessments showed these treatments were 88% effective in changing fire behavior on treated land. Bureaus at the DOI treated nearly 950,000 acres in FY 2014 — more than 75% 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 \$170 million for DOI and \$384.1 million for USDA in FY 2017.

- **State Fire Assistance (USDA: \$86 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 2015, directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on approximately 150,000 acres and provided assistance to more than 15,000 communities as they prepared for (and mitigated the risk of) wildland fire. The Administration proposed continuing to fund SFA at the FY 2016 level of \$78 million.

The IAFC urges you to provide \$86 million, the FY 2012 funding level, for this important program for FY 2017.

- **Volunteer Fire Assistance (USDA: \$16 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 2015, VFA grants were used to train more than 22,000 firefighters; expand or create 20 fire departments; and purchase, rehabilitate, or maintain \$8.1 million in equipment. The Administration proposed funding VFA at the FY 2016 level of \$13 million.

As you develop FY 2016 appropriations legislation, the IAFC asks that you reject the Administration’s proposal and provide \$16 million, the FY 2010 funding level, for the VFA program.

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.

The national energy boom has focused attention on the importance of safely transporting high volume flammable liquids such as crude oil and other hazardous materials across the country. Most of these accidents happen in areas served by combination and volunteer fire departments. Local fire and emergency services must have the necessary training to respond to these incidents.

- **Maintain Funding for the ALERT Grant Program:** Funded with fees paid by hazardous materials shippers and carriers, PHMSA's Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness (HMEP) program provides \$28 million each year to assist state and tribal governments in developing, improving, and implementing emergency plans; training public sector hazardous materials emergency response employees; determining flow patterns of hazardous materials through communities; and determining the need within a state for regional hazardous materials response teams. Unfortunately, this funding is not meeting the needs of small, rural volunteer fire departments and, in some cases, was being returned unspent by the states.

In order to address this issue, Congress included provisions in the FY 2015 and FY 2016 Consolidated and Further Appropriations Acts (P.L. 113-235; P.L. 114-113) that directed PHMSA to use prior-year carryovers from the HMEP program to develop web-based training to plan and respond to hazardous materials incidents. The training from the Assistance for Local Emergency Response Training (ALERT) grant program 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 supports the use of both web-based and in-person training of 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. It is easy for fire departments to use, because they just have to access a web portal through the internet or use a CD, instead of traveling to a location or scheduling a class period with an in-person trainer. Also, it is easier to schedule web-based training in the evening or weekend for volunteer firefighters, or just sign up and take the training remotely during free time. Finally, because there are little transportation costs, it is much more cost-effective to reach a wide population of fire and emergency responders through web-based training.

The Administration's proposed budget for FY 2017 supports – for the first time – the use of unspent HMEP funds for ALERT grant training of emergency responders to develop web-based training.

For FY 2017, the IAFC supports appropriating \$28 million for PHMSA's HMEP grants. In addition, we also request that the committee continue the approach adopted in P.L. 113-235, P.L. 114-113, and the proposed President's budget for FY 2017 which would use past years' carry-over funding to fund the ALERT grant program's 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.

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 703.537.4847 or klasala@iafc.org.

Sincerely,



Fire Chief Rhoda Mae Kerr, EFO, CFO, MPA
President and Chair 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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