

Background Talking Points for FAMA/FEMSA Hill Day Meetings
May 22-24, 2023

FUND the ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTER GRANTS (AFG)
EQUIPMENT PROGRAM at \$405 Million for FY 2024

The Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) equipment program is one of the most efficiently run and effective programs in the federal government.

Funds are administered out of FEMA's staff account, so that nearly all AFG funds appropriated are distributed directly to local fire departments. Bureaucracy is minimal; local community benefit is maximum.

Through the FEMA program, fire departments of all sizes purchase personal protective clothing (PPE), self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), personal alert safety system (PASS) devices, fire apparatus, and other essential safety and response equipment.

Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations funded the AFG program at a level of \$360 million, far less than the demonstrated need, and an 11% decrease from FY 2011 funding level of \$405 million. Compared to FY 2009 funding (\$565 million), this year's funding level represents a 36% cut in this important program.

However, Congress did increase AFG by \$5 million in FY 2021, with a \$5 million increase for SAFER as well. We thank Congress for doing what it could to respond to the shortfall in funding.

We also thank Congress for providing \$100 million in AFG funding through the CARES Act, as well as \$100 million for AFG and \$200 million for SAFER, in the American Rescue Plan to combat COVID-19.

Without further expansion of the AFG program, communities and their first responders would be left short-changed as local governments continue to struggle to meet capital infrastructure needs.

Fire and Rescue Service

Fire and rescue service personnel responded to 39.6 million calls in 2021, up from 36.4 million calls in 2020. As the aging population expands, and the demands of our emergency services increase from future disasters, this number is expected to grow significantly.

Local fire and rescue personnel represent the backbone of the nation's first response capabilities, serving as an integral part of our national comprehensive response strategy for both natural disasters and potential terrorism events. Recent severe weather events underscore the importance local first responders play in serving the public.

The nation had approximately 1 million fire and rescue personnel in 2020, with 676,900 of these serving as volunteers (65%). Without such service, the nation's response capability would be seriously compromised and no longer universal, serving all communities.

Since 2019, the average cost for turnout gear has increased by 35-40%, while the cost of fire apparatus (pumpers) has increased by around 32%. However, over the last decade, AFG funding has remained largely flat, as costs to the American fire service continue to rise. Congress must increase AFG funding to commensurately meet the climbing cost of life-saving firefighting equipment.

FAMA and FEMSA represent the industry that "helps first responders save lives." Our U.S. members (over 250 companies) employ 95,873 U.S. workers, and tend to be small and medium-sized businesses.

By funding AFG, Congress supports our first responders as they meet increasing security and rescue needs. This is particularly important given the increase in frequency, severity, and cost of natural disasters – hurricanes, tornados, floods, and wildfires.

In 2022 alone, there were 18 disasters in the U.S. that cost over \$1 billion in damage. Together these disasters cost our country \$175.2 billion total. To put this in perspective, between 1980 and 1989, there were an average of 3.3 disasters in the U.S. that cost over \$1 billion per year. The average cost of these disasters per year was \$21 billion.

Compared to 2022, these numbers reflect a 446% increase in frequency of billion-dollar disasters, and an over 734% increase in annual cost.

The frequency and cost of these large-scale disasters is expected to rise dramatically in the coming years, and it will be the responsibility of the nation's fire service to respond.

As the nation's first responders continue to fulfill their role to locally execute the nation's response to COVID-19 and other disasters, it is critical that AFG funding is expanded to support them in meeting the nation's emergencies.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grants equipment program is extremely important to your state's first responders. (Provide summary of Number and Size of AFG Awards to the State).

The "ASK" to Your Senators and Representatives

For FY 2024, please restore funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grants equipment program by expressing to the Appropriation Committee Members your support for funding of **\$405 million each for AFG and SAFER.**

AFG and SAFER fire grant programs were funded at \$360 million each in FY2023.

The AFG and SAFER programs must be reauthorized in 2023. In April, the Senate passed the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S.870), which reauthorizes AFG, SAFER, and the U.S. Fire Administration. It is critical that the House also passes a reauthorization bill so that these programs can continue.

Fund the U.S. Fire Administration in FY 2024 at **\$60.33 million**. USFA provides vital training to 100,000 first responder personnel annually, but over the last decade it has been cut significantly.

Fund the Urban Search and Rescue Response System (USAR) at **\$75 million**. The Urban Search and Rescue program is essential to our capacity to respond to dramatic natural and man-made events across the nation. We, unfortunately, see increased risk for both types of events in the foreseeable future.

If the Senator or Congressman is a member of the Congressional Fire Caucus, thank them for their membership. If they are NOT members, ask them to join.

Handouts for the Congressional Meetings

- 10 Key Facts of the Fire Service (to be provided by FAMA/FEMSA GAC)
- Four-page packet, which includes a summary of AFG program, AFG and SAFER historic funding levels, data on fire equipment cost increases and the frequency and severity of disasters, and the FAMA/FEMSA employment map.
- Data report on Fire Departments Funded through the Assistance to Firefighters Grants program in the State (will be provided by FAMA/FEMSA GAC).
- Separate FAMA/FEMSA Map of 95,873 fire service industry jobs, including the list of FAMA and FEMSA U.S. member companies.