



NVFC Legislative Report – January 11, 2021

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- AFG/SAFER Grant Program Appropriations
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- Volunteer Emergency Services Recruitment and Retention Act (H.R. 4036/S. 2214)

AFG/SAFER Appropriations

OVERVIEW: The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program provides funding to fire departments and some non-fire-based EMS agencies to purchase equipment, training, and apparatus. The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program provides assistance for the hiring and retention of career firefighters as well as recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Both programs direct funding to recipients based on criteria established by the fire service and a competitive, peer-reviewed grant process.

CURRENT STATUS: Congress provided \$360 million each for AFG and SAFER in FY 2021, a \$5 million increase from the level provided in FY 2020.

Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (H.R. 1241/S. 1210)

OVERVIEW: The Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA) makes property tax benefits and up to \$600 per year in other benefits (such as per-call payments, stipends, etc.) exempt from federal income tax and reporting.

CURRENT STATUS: VRIPA was an active measure in the tax code from 2008-2010, and in 2020. In December 2020, Congress made VRIPA a permanent measure in the tax code.

USFA Appropriations

OVERVIEW: The United States Fire Administration (USFA) provides training to more than 80,000 fire and emergency services personnel each year. USFA also performs research and collects data specific to the fire service and fire service activities and educates the public on the importance of fire safety. The long-term health of USFA and its National Fire Academy (NFA) are critical to the fire service.

CURRENT STATUS: In FY 2021 Congress provided \$49.3 million for USFA, a \$2.5 million increase over the level provided in FY 2020.

Fire Police Fairness Act

OVERVIEW: The Fire Police Fairness Act clarifies that members of fire departments who perform traffic incident management duties at the scene of emergencies and planned special events – commonly referred to as “fire police” – are firefighters for the purposes of eligibility for the Public Safety Officers’ Benefit. This would simplify the process by which fire police officers are able to qualify for PSOB, which has become unnecessarily complicated in recent years.

CURRENT STATUS: The Fire Police Fairness Act (H.R. 2709) was introduced by Representatives Joe Courtney (D-CT) and Glenn Thompson (R-PA) on May 14, 2019. On May 15, 2019, the U.S. Senate passed the Protecting America's First Responders Act (S. 1208), which contained the Fire Police Fairness Act language. H.R. 2812, House legislation identical to S. 1208, was introduced by Representatives Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) and Peter King (R-NY) on May 16, 2019. None of these bills were enacted prior to the 116th Congress adjourning.

Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Appropriations

OVERVIEW: VFA is a grant program that provides funding to rural fire departments on a 50/50 cost share basis to pay for training, equipment, and protective clothing to help them prepare for wildland fires. VFA is administered by the U.S. Forest Service and funds are distributed by state forestry agencies. In FY 2018, VFA helped 13,959 communities, trained 21,868 firefighters, expanded or helped to organize. 48 fire departments, and assisted with the purchase, rehabilitation, or maintenance of nearly \$11 million worth of equipment.

CURRENT STATUS: Congress funded VFA at \$19 million in FY 2020, a \$1 million increase over the level provided in FY 2020.

National Firefighter Registry Appropriations

OVERVIEW: In July 2018, Congress passed the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act, directing the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to establish a National Firefighter Registry to collect, on a voluntary basis, health, occupational, and other information from firefighters on an ongoing basis. That information will be maintained in the Registry until such time as one of the participating firefighters contracts cancer, at which point the information will be deidentified and matched with data from existing state cancer registries. The idea is to create a large dataset from which public health researchers and others can draw from learn more about the causes of firefighter cancer in order to better treat and prevent it.

CURRENT STATUS: The Firefighter Cancer Registry Act authorizes \$2.5 million per year to be spent by the CDC for the purpose of developing and maintaining the Registry. In FY 2021 Congress provided the full \$2.5 million for the Registry..

SIREN Act Appropriations

OVERVIEW: In December 2018, Congress passed the SIREN Act, establishing a grant program at the Department of Health and Human Services for rural EMS agencies to help pay for equipment, training, and staffing. SIREN grants are capped at \$200,000 and there is a ten percent local matching requirement. Public and private, non-profit EMS agencies that serve rural areas are eligible to apply for SIREN funding.

CURRENT STATUS: In FY 2021 Congress provided \$5.5 million for SIREN.