



# INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER  
General President

EDWARD A. KELLY  
General Secretary-Treasurer

June 5, 2020

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the more than 320,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel on the frontlines, I am writing to ask for your support of further legislation addressing the COVID-19 pandemic facing the nation.

Fire departments of all sizes are facing increased costs due to an unforeseen pandemic that has proven to last longer and impact more people than could have ever been predicted. Departments are responding to increased calls for COVID-19 patients as well as common emergencies, while incurring increased expenditures for personal protective and decontamination equipment, overtime, quarantining fire fighters who were exposed to the virus, and other associated costs. At the same time, fire department budgets have been hit hard by the current economic crisis as local governments are facing decreased tax revenue and other significant fiscal pressures due to shuttered businesses and reduced tourism. As a result, many fire departments are facing deep budget cuts, including potential fire fighter layoffs and reductions in force. A recent survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors revealed that 52 percent of cities will incur budget cuts that impact public safety and communities of all sizes. To address these budget hardships, localities will be forced to either cut vital services, lay off workers - impacting public safety, or increase taxes on people already struggling from the economic recession.

Legislation recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives builds upon the unfinished work of previous COVID-related legislation by providing fire fighters and emergency medical personnel the tools and resources they need to continue serving their communities, as well as provide such personnel necessary protections to ensure they stay safe and healthy on the job. As the Senate develops its next COVID package, we encourage you to include these important provisions.

- \$1 billion for fire departments through the Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs to help departments purchase PPE and decontamination materials, and help departments retain and rehire personnel at risk of layoffs.
- Waivers from budgetary requirements under AFG and SAFER to allow departments with budgetary challenges the necessary flexibility to afford essential equipment and personnel.
- \$500 billion for states and \$375 billion for local governments to address COVID-related expenses and replace lost revenue stemming from the public health emergency.
- Increases the federal share for reimbursement under the Disaster Relief Fund to 100 percent to assist cash-strapped state and local governments.
- Extends emergency sick and emergency FMLA leave to first responders.

- Creates a presumption for COVID-19 under the Public Safety Officers Benefit Program, so fire fighters who die or are permanently disabled in the line of duty from COVID-19 are guaranteed federal death / disability benefits.
- Establishes a COVID-19 presumption under federal workers' compensation, to ensure federal fire fighters who become ill from COVID-19 receive necessary benefits.
- Enacts special rules allowing federal fire fighters to remain in their special retirement if forced to return to work in a non-fire position due to COVID injuries.
- Repeals the T-band mandate, allowing public safety entities in 11 major metropolitan areas to continue communications activities on the section of spectrum known as the T-band in 2021.

Again, we request you include the above provisions in any upcoming legislation responding to the current pandemic, to ensure fire fighters receive the resources and benefits they need to continue serving their communities at this difficult and dangerous time.

Thank you for your consideration and your support of the nation's frontline workers.

Sincerely,



Harold A. Schaitberger  
General President