



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

NEWS from Fire Fighters

1750 NEW YORK AVE NW WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006 • WWW.IAFF.ORG

For Immediate Release
June 24, 2009

Contact: Bill Glanz
202 824-1566

President Obama Approves New SAFER Rules

In an economic crisis, changes will allow fire departments to use SAFER grants to retain fire fighters

Washington, DC – President Obama today approved new rules that govern how fire departments can use funding from the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program, an important change during an economic crisis that is responsible for widespread layoffs of fire fighters throughout the country.

The new guidelines will apply to the \$210 million that Congress approved for SAFER for Fiscal Year 2009. The IAFF wrote and lobbied for the new provision that was included in HR 2346, the Supplemental Appropriation bill – which was initiated and supported by President Obama – to allow the use of SAFER grant funding to rehire laid-off fire fighters and prevent fire department staffing reductions that occurred as a result of the current financial crisis.

With its passage, the bill grants Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano the discretion to waive the rules governing the current SAFER program and make funds available to save IAFF members' jobs. The IAFF will immediately begin working with DHS to develop new rules that outline how SAFER grants can be used to address the current wave of staffing cuts.

“Changes in this supplemental appropriation extend a lifeline to fire departments across the nation at a time when fire fighters are losing their jobs,” International Association of Fire Fighters General President Harold Schaitberger said. “Adequate staffing is the most critical component to effective response and civilian and fire fighter safety.”

The SAFER Act provides money for all departments to increase staffing, which is the most pressing need among all departments across the country. The funding is available to all fire departments. Under the original law, passed in 2004, communities could only receive a SAFER grant if they planned to increase fire department staffing levels. Fire fighters hired with SAFER grants had to be retained for at least five years and fire department couldn't reduce staffing levels during this period. Those restrictions have combined to prohibit fire departments from using SAFER grants to prevent layoffs, and have discouraged fire departments from applying for SAFER grants during this current economic recession.

The rule changes approved today by the president eliminate the language that has prevented using this money to alleviate the need to lay off a fire fighter. In addition, President Obama is proposing \$420 million for SAFER in his Fiscal Year 2010 budget.

The International Association of Fire Fighters, headquartered in Washington, DC, is the leading advocate in North America for the safety and training of fire fighters and paramedics. The IAFF represents more than 295,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics who protect communities in every state in the United States and in Canada. More information is available at www.iaff.org

###