



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER
General President

EDWARD A. KELLY
General Secretary-Treasurer

April 17 2020

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the nation's 320,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel, I am writing to share with you the continuing needs of our nation's emergency medical services (EMS) personnel on the frontlines of the COVID-19 outbreak. We appreciate the steps Congress has already taken to support fire and EMS personnel in the CARES Act. However, the continuing nature of the crisis requires additional assistance, particularly as state and local governments face increasing costs and decreasing tax revenues due to the emerging recession.

Fire departments of all sizes report a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), and other equipment such as cleaning and decontamination materials. Additionally, large numbers of fire fighters and EMS personnel are currently quarantined, leaving fire departments with sizable gaps in their ability to respond to regular emergencies and increased call volumes during this time of community anxiety.

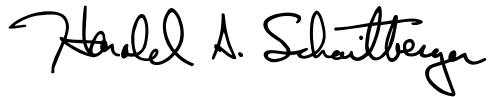
To address these vital needs and ensure fire and EMS personnel are best able to serve their communities as frontline responders to the current pandemic, the nation's fire and emergency services recommend the following:

- **Increase the federal cost share for assistance under FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program to 100 percent.** Fire and EMS departments face increased costs due to the response to the pandemic, and decreased tax revenues due to shuttered businesses and the nascent recession. Waiving the local cost share will allow fire and EMS departments to continue serving their communities at full capacity and help the nation recover more quickly.
- **Provide supplemental direct funding to fire and EMS departments for necessary equipment, such as PPE, and personnel needs, including overtime and backfill, through the Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant programs.** Waivers for the programs' peer-review and matching requirements, as well as the multi-year period of performance requirements under SAFER, would allow funds to be distributed quickly to affected departments. Additionally, waivers allowing SAFER grantees to retain or rehire fire fighters in order to avoid staffing reductions will be necessary due to the enormous fiscal challenges faced by local fire departments.
- **Create a presumption under the Public Safety Officer Benefit Program (PSOB) that public safety officers who contract COVID-19 contracted the virus in the line of duty to clearly establish eligibility for death or disability benefits.**

- **Repeal the employer’s ability to exclude first responders under the emergency paid sick leave and emergency FMLA leave provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.**
- **Extend hazard pay to all federal fire fighters and waive the federal fire fighter overtime cap under 5 USC 5547.** Federal fire fighters are on the frontlines of the battle against the current pandemic, providing a full range of emergency response services, including EMS services at military bases, veterans’ hospitals and other federal facilities. They are in constant proximity to patients needing medical attention and are at high risk for contracting the disease.

Protecting fire and EMS personnel is critical to ensuring public safety and health. Communities will continue to rely upon fire departments and EMS providers to deliver emergency medical services. Congress must ensure these healthcare practitioners have the resources and ability to care for all the patients in their community. Thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harold A. Schaitberger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "H".

Harold A. Schaitberger
General President