

Funding for SAFER and FIRE Act Grants

The IAFF supports increased funding for the SAFER and FIRE Act grant programs and providing \$810 million, evenly divided, for the two programs.

BACKGROUND

The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) and Assistance to Firefighters (FIRE Act) grant programs were created by Congress to help address the significant staffing, equipment, training and health and safety needs of fire departments. SAFER provides funding to help pay the costs associated with hiring personnel to maintain safe staffing levels, while FIRE Act grants fund equipment, training and other fire department needs.

The importance of adequate fire department staffing has been researched and is well-documented in independent studies. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the consensus standards-making body of the fire service, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) have both promulgated standards for the minimum number of fire fighters needed to respond safely and effectively to emergencies. Far too few jurisdictions meet these minimum safe staffing levels.

Similarly, the FIRE Act grant program allows fire departments to purchase equipment and receive training that those departments would not otherwise afford. Equipment and training funded by the FIRE Act grant program help fire fighters do their jobs safely and effectively by improving the effectiveness of fire department operations and protecting the health and safety of local fire fighters.

For Fiscal Year 2019, SAFER and FIRE Act grants were funded at \$700 million – \$350 million each. Although the programs have received small funding increases in recent years, funding remains down from an historical high of \$810 million. Unfortunately, costs to adequately staff and equip fire departments continue to rise, causing shortages that have long faced fire departments to worsen. Such shortages not only threaten fire fighter safety, they undermine emergency response capabilities and pose significant threats to public safety and local preparedness.

LEGISLATION

Funding for SAFER and FIRE Act grants for the upcoming fiscal year will be addressed as part of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2020.

The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security will consider the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bills in the spring of 2019.