

Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts, Inc.



Federal Legislative Priorities The 119th Congress

Protect the FIRE/SAFER Grant Programs

- **The Problem:** As fire departments continue to respond to a variety of increased threats, the strain on fire department equipment and personnel remains high. As equipment and overtime/backfill costs escalate, many fire departments across the country cannot afford the equipment, training, and staffing necessary to meet a baseline level of readiness. This situation puts firefighters and their communities in danger.
- **The Solution:** The FIRE and SAFER grant programs augment local funding and provide much needed assistance to meet these needs. President Biden signed the Fire Grants and Safety Act (P.L. 118-67) on July 9, 2024. The new law will authorize \$750 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs through Fiscal Year (FY) 2028. It also will delay the elimination of the programs to September 30, 2030. However, we still must fund these important programs. Congress approved \$324 million each for the FIRE and SAFER grant programs in FY 2024. *This is a 10% cut to both programs.* The House of Representatives passed its FY 2025 U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (H.R. 8752) on June 28, 2024, with \$367.5 million for each program. Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee recommended \$360 million for each program.

Funding for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and National Fire Academy (NFA)

- **The Problem:** The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) provides necessary training and policy resources to local fire departments. Currently, it is developing the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) to replace the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). It is important that USFA be funded to continue its critical mission.
- **The Solution:** President Biden signed the Fire Grants and Safety Act (P.L. 118-67) on July 9, 2024. The new law will authorize \$95 million for USFA through FY 2028. Congress appropriated more than \$71 million for USFA in FY 2024. For FY 2025, President Biden is proposing \$78.6 million for USFA, which includes funding for upgrades at the National Fire Academy (NFA). In H.R. 8752, the House passed \$78.3 million for USFA. The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee recommended \$80.6 million for the USFA.

Extending the Medicare Ambulance Add-On Payments

- **The Problem:** Medicare continues to under-reimburse fire departments for the pre-hospital medical care that they provide to Medicare beneficiaries. In order to better align the cost of care with reimbursements, Congress created Ambulance Add-On Payments, which provide additional payments to fire/EMS agencies depending upon a patient's location. If Congress does not act, the authorization for these payments will expire after April 1.
- **The Solution:** Currently, CMS includes add-on rates for the reimbursement of the transportation of Medicare patients: 2% for urban; 3% for rural; and 22.6% for super rural areas. The American Relief Act (P.L. 118-158) extended these add-on payments through April 1.

Preserve the FirstNet Authority

- **The Problem:** Congress created the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) to establish a nationwide public safety broadband network. The network gives public safety both preemption and priority on their own spectrum. FirstNet has been used in numerous major disasters by public safety agencies, including active shooter incidents, wildland fires, and hurricanes. More than 29,500 public safety agencies and organizations are subscribers to FirstNet. Currently, FirstNet is scheduled to be sunset and end operations on February 22, 2027.
- **The Solution:** Congress must pass legislation to remove the February 22, 2027, sunset date to prevent FirstNet's termination.

Develop Federal Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries and Micromobility Devices

- **The Problem:** The nation has witnessed an increase in deadly fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices. The lithium-ion batteries can become overcharged or damaged and create explosive, deadly fires that put both firefighters and the public at risk.
- **The Solution:** Representative Ritchie Torres (D-NY) and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced the Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act last Congress. This bill would require the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to issue safety standards on lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices.

Preserving AM Radio in New Vehicles as a Free, Standard Service

- **The Problem:** AM radio has long served as a dependable means of communication, especially in situations where other forms of communication may be compromised. Recently, auto manufacturers have threatened to remove AM radios from new cars.
- **The Solution:** Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) and Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act of 2025 (S. 315). This legislation would require every newly manufactured car to include AM Radio as a free service. The IAFC supports legislation that would require every newly manufactured vehicle to include AM radio. Some electric vehicle manufacturers have claimed that AM radios cause unnecessary interference. However, this is unproven. First responders rely upon AM radio to disseminate important critical alert information. AM radio's ability to alert the public is essential in rural areas or at times when other means of communication have failed.

