

American Ambulance Association \* Congressional Fire Services Institute \* International Association of Fire Chiefs \* International Association of Fire Fighters \* National Association of Counties \* National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians \* National Association of Towns and Townships \* National Fire Protection Association \* National Rural Health Association \* National Volunteer Fire Council

October 21, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Shelby, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of American Ambulance Association, Congressional Fire Services Institute, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, National Association of Counties, National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, National Association of Towns and Townships, National Fire Protection Association, National Rural Health Association, and the National Volunteer Fire Council, representing our nation's fire fighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), thank you for your ongoing support of the emergency medical services (EMS) workforce and agencies. The Rural EMS Equipment and Training Assistance (REMSTEA) grants, also known as the SIREN Grants, provide critical support to the fire departments and EMS agencies that provide medical care to their patients and communities nationwide, especially in the most rural parts of our country.

**As you work on the FY 2023 appropriations bills, we respectfully request the Labor-HHS-Education Conference Report include the Senate-recommended funding level of \$15 million for this critical program.**

The COVID-19 public health emergency has reinforced the great need for increased federal support for fire and EMS agencies. The additional burdens placed on EMS systems and personnel during this public health emergency have been challenging, even for the strongest systems. Fire and EMS personnel serving in rural areas have been especially strained by the continuously high call volume due to COVID-19, the ongoing opioid epidemic, and patients suffering from substance abuse, and other "routine" incidents such as car accidents and medical emergencies. The SIREN grants, which are administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), help ensure that fire and EMS agencies can continue to have the staffing, training, and supplies needed to care for critically ill and injured patients in their communities.

EMS systems throughout our nation are at the breaking point. Rural systems, which were already struggling before the pandemic, face particularly acute financial challenges. Most communities are facing crisis-level shortages of fire and EMS personnel and aging equipment and vehicles. The SIREN program is an important way for Congress to assist these rural agencies in ensuring they are prepared to meet the emergency medical needs of their communities.

Our organizations are grateful for Congress' strong support of rural fire and EMS agencies as is evident by the continued growth of the SIREN program. Despite the growth of the SIREN program, it has been unable to meet the overwhelming need that rural fire and EMS agencies are experiencing. In FY 2020 and 2021, SAMHSA awarded SIREN grants to approximately 27 EMS agencies to maintain or expand their EMS services. In FY 2022, SAMHSA nearly doubled the number of awards provided by supporting 40 grantees. Despite this growth, SAMHSA was still unable to fully fund the agencies seeking SIREN funding.

Our organizations appreciated the Senate Labor-HHS Subcommittee's report which recognized the ongoing EMS workforce crisis in regard to preparedness and response and separately recommended a higher funding level of \$15 million for SIREN/REMSTEAs. This grant program is one critical way for Congress to address the ongoing workforce shortage by supporting the ability of rural fire and EMS agencies to recruit personnel to serve their communities. While greater support for our nation's fire and EMS agencies is needed, this is a meaningful and impactful step towards addressing this shortage of fire and EMS personnel.

In closing, we concur with the Senate Labor-HHS Committee's recommendation to provide \$15 million for the SIREN/REMSTEAs program in FY 2023 and encourage you to maintain this funding level in the final Labor-HHS appropriations bill that Congress will consider. The SIREN/REMSTEAs program is a critical means to supporting rural fire and EMS agencies, and we urge you to continue your support for this program. Thank you for your support for rural fire and EMS agencies and we look forward to continuing to work with you to address the health needs of rural communities across the United States.

Sincerely,

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Congressional Fire Services Institute  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
International Association of Fire Fighters  
National Association of Counties  
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National Association of Towns and Townships  
National Fire Protection Association  
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National Volunteer Fire Council

CC: The Honorable Patty Murray  
The Honorable Roy Blunt  
The Honorable Tom Cole