



**TESTIMONY**

**for the**

**Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation**

**of the**

**Committee on Science and Technology**

**U.S. House of Representatives**

**on**

**“The Reauthorization of the FIRE Grant Programs”**

**By**

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Good morning. I am Curt Varone, Division Manager, Public Fire Protection, for the National Fire Protection Association. Mr. Chairman, Subcommittee members, NFPA strongly supports the reauthorization of the U.S. FIRE Grant Programs the Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) and appreciates the opportunity to speak about these programs.

For my allotted time I want to focus on three areas – research we have done to analyze the needs of our nation’s fire service and the impact these programs have had on alleviating the needs, some thoughts on enhancements that can be considered during reauthorization and lastly NFPA’s position on the most effective ways to continue to reduce fires and fire fatalities.

By way of background, NFPA is the principal source for voluntary consensus codes and standards related to fire safety and the fire service. Our standards use a “true consensus” approach, to address a broad range of topics such as

professional qualifications; performance, testing, maintenance, and operation standards for protective and firefighting equipment.

Many NFPA codes and standards appear as mandatory references cited throughout federal agency regulations, including DHS, DOT, CMS, EPA and OSHA.

NFPA is also a recognized authority on fire analysis and research.

In 2001 and 2005, working with the US Fire Administration, NFPA conducted two national surveys of the needs of U.S. municipal fire departments. In both surveys, “needs” were defined as the comparison of department resources to resources required for compliance with applicable national standards and guidelines.

As part of the second needs assessment, NFPA examined the degree of match between the type of resource for which a grant was awarded and the department’s reported need for that type

of resource. NFPA also examined the changes in levels of need for the most commonly requested types of resources.

Our analysis concluded that the grant program was well-designed, well-executed and well-targeted and has made a difference in the needs it was intended to address. However, the difference has been limited simply because the needs of our nation's first responders are great. Despite this, some notable changes stand out:

The percentage of departments with enough self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) to equip all emergency responders on a shift increased by 10 percentage points, from 30% to 40% of departments. The percentage of departments with enough personal alert safety system (PASS) devices to equip all emergency responders on a shift increased by 14 percentage points, from 38% to 52%. Personal protective equipment accounted for the largest share (39%) of grant funds awarded for the departments and years analyzed.

The NFPA matching analysis, part of our second needs assessment, shows a positive correlation between the expressed need and impact of the AFG program in targeting that need.

NFPA believes that there are ample data to support the successful initiation by both programs of vital changes necessary to successfully protect the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel against fire and fire-related hazards. The AFG program is a good beginning and SAFER is an even more recent good beginning. We have a long way to go to close our national gap in staffing and we need to continue supporting SAFER for several years in order to ensure that it fulfills its objective of helping fire departments meet safe staffing levels to provide protection from fire as well as emergency response to many other hazards identified by DHS.

These programs can be strengthened. In the reauthorization, NFPA believes that it would be appropriate to eliminate the cost share in the Fire Prevention and Firefighter Safety Grant as was

the original intent of the program or to allow a waiver or reduction of the match requirement for applicants facing a demonstrated economic hardship.

Data show that roughly three out of every five emergency responses by U.S. fire departments are medical emergency calls; therefore, NFPA recommends that a minimum of 5% of funding be designated for fire service-based emergency medical services (EMS). Finally, NFPA believes that funds for training and equipment should be utilized to meet the latest applicable national voluntary consensus standards available at the time of application.

In order to facilitate fire prevention and control activities, the USFA could identify specific safety strategies they wish to give priorities in the call for proposals, specify fire and life safety education programs in the listed grant fund purposes and/or require all AFG grants to include an aligned fire prevention or mitigation project. The USFA could also direct some funds to building the prevention personnel and organizational

infrastructure in local fire departments. An NFPA research project on fire code effectiveness measurement showed several examples of how lack of funding and other limitations are forcing communities to leave most inspectable commercial properties uninspected.

Lastly, the way to decrease the number of fires and fire related fatalities, particularly in vulnerable populations, is through a combination of education – teaching individuals how they can be safer from fire; engineering -- utilizing the latest technologies to prevent, mitigate, detect and suppress fire; and enforcement -- ensuring that the latest codes and standards are being followed. To do this, we need to adequately staff, train and equip the local fire services.

Today, we ask our fire service to do a lot more than fight fires. We ask them to be the first line of defense in the full range of ordinary and extraordinary situations. As we place more demands on them, we must be willing to provide them with the resources to do the job. We know from our analysis that the fire

service is woefully underfunded. The Fire Grant programs are working, are moving the fire service in the right direction and must continue. It is essential the FIRE grant programs be reauthorized.

Thank you.