

# Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

May 26, 2020

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street SW  
Washington, DC 20024-2523

Dear Administrator Gaynor,

We thank you for your agency's extension of the deadline for the Fiscal Year 2019 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (FY19 SAFER) Grant Program applications. As our nation's fire departments grapple with the spread of COVID-19 in their communities, we encourage the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to also waive the requirement that FY19 SAFER grant spending be used on new firefighter hires only.

Public health concerns have forced cities across the country to shut down and, in turn, take drastic budgetary measures. This threatens the immediate viability of fire stations. Fire stations are struggling to retain the experienced firefighters already on staff—the same men and women that go out day after day as first responders to some of our most vulnerable. As of now, FY19 SAFER grantees could only hire new firefighters at the equivalent cost of a first-year. Normally, this would be welcome assistance to get a station up to required staffing levels with fresh talent. However, during this public health crisis, we feel that retaining experienced fire men and women is most important.

As you know, Congress gave your agency the authority to waive certain FY19 SAFER requirements<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, recent Office of Management and Budget memoranda have given you considerable leeway for waivers.<sup>2</sup> We are thankful for the waived requirements and modifications you released on May 14, 2020. As you consider additional waivers, we encourage you to waive the FY19 SAFER grant spending requirement on new firefighter hires only.

Thank you for your attention to this request, should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact our offices.

Sincerely,



Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress



Darin LaHood  
Member of Congress

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<sup>1</sup> Division A, Title III, Section 307 of P.L. 116-6.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.*, Memorandum to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, Office of Management and Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M-20-17.pdf> (March 19, 2020).