



International Association of Fire Chiefs

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April 22, 2020

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

On behalf of the membership of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today concerning the challenges facing our nation's fire chiefs and EMS chiefs during this pandemic. I know your time is precious and allowing nearly an hour of your time was important to address the issues impacting the fire service.

As you heard during our conversation, the fire service challenges are many. As I indicated, we are not here to complain but to provide feedback on what is working and not working and hopefully provide solutions.

First, thank you for clarifying that FEMA considers firefighters and paramedics as the same priority as healthcare workers when it comes to the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE). It continues to be important that our "warriors" at the "tip of the spear" have the PPE. We ask that you please convey this to the states who are in some cases, reprioritizing critical medical supplies to those other than firefighters and paramedics. Additionally, we believe that in order for states to receive FEMA funding, they must accept conditions that prioritize fire departments, EMS agencies, firefighters, and paramedics also as a Tier 1 resource typing.

As we discussed, it has been 27 days since President Trump signed the CARES Act into law and the fire service continues to await the announcement of AFG applications for the \$100 million appropriated by Congress for critically needed COVID-19 supplies. By our estimation, by the time the grant is announced, applications accepted, reviewed, and approved, it will be two months or more since the Act was passed into law. Frustration is mounting, and our fire chiefs are asking us why the Department of Justice (DOJ), through the Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG), has already distributed \$179 million out of the \$850 million appropriated in the CARES Act for local law enforcement COVID-19 supplies.



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That said, we are well aware that there are significant differences in the AFG and BJA JAG legislation and rules and that you must follow the rules in place. However, to the fire chief out on the frontline, the differences between AFG and JAG mean very little and they are asking me to find any means possible to cut the red tape and get the funds out.

That said, we respectfully ask that where possible, you and Acting DHS Secretary Wolf seek “outside the box” solutions or actions to waive certain requirements and/or streamline the process. Your ingenuity and assistance are greatly needed to remove any obstacles possible under the current AFG rules that are impeding the timely distribution of this important funding for fire departments.

Finally, I sent a letter to President Trump and leaders in both House of Congress on April 13th. Contained within that letter was a request that any future stimulus bill include \$5 billion for the AFG program and \$5 billion for the SAFER program. Volunteer fire departments have been unable to fund-raise; career fire department budgets have been decimated by the unbudgeted overtime money needed to respond to this pandemic; supply budgets have been depleted; and local governments are now preparing to layoff firefighters as a result of the impact on local revenues related to stay-at-home-orders. This future funding is absolutely critical to keep a ready response force in every community in America for COVID-19 response, as well as the next local emergency, regional catastrophe or nationwide disaster. I would ask that you support these funding measures within the Administration.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express our concerns. We stand ready to assist you in whatever way is possible.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary Ludwig".

Chief Gary Ludwig
President and Chairman of the Board