

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 21, 2020

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

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write as Members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation to strongly urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to waive state and local cost-share requirements for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) and Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) programs.

Ordinarily, the federal government is responsible for paying at most 75 percent of the costs of hiring firefighters for this program in the first and second years of this program. The FEMA Administrator has the authority to waive state and local cost-share requirements by raising the federal portion to 100 percent in cases of demonstrated economic hardship.

State and local governments now responding to the COVID-19 epidemic and consequent economic downturn are faced with historically unprecedented revenue shortfalls. Budgets will undoubtedly come under stress and sacrifices may have to be made. But we cannot afford to cut corners on emergency preparedness to save costs.

Firefighters provide our communities with essential insurance against the damage of fire emergencies. Fire is a risk to lives, property, and infrastructure that is real and deserving of our consideration even as we grasp with a viral outbreak. Substantial portions of the labor involved come from the service of dutiful volunteers.

In Maryland, many local volunteer fire departments expect drastically reduced collections and donations from their respective communities. Several Maryland county executives have written to us and called for a waiver of the requirements for local matches to existing and future SAFER and AFG grants. The Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) also supports this request.

Your action would provide significant relief to fire departments in both urban and rural jurisdictions. In a public health and now economic crisis unlike any other, Maryland desperately needs federal funding that can help alleviate budget shortfalls while also ensuring that critical services such as fire protection and emergency response do not suffer and are not put in jeopardy.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/ John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/ Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/ Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security

The Honorable MaryAnn E. Tierney, Regional Administrator for FEMA Region III