

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 27, 2021

The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
2162 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman Pingree, and Ranking Member Joyce:

As you begin work on the Interior Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, we respectfully request increasing funding to help state and local agencies fight wildfires across the nation.

To fully and adequately fight fires and keep our homes and communities safe, **we request a total of \$88.5 million for the State Fire Assistance program (SFA) and \$20 million for the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program (VFA).**

America's forests and forest-dependent communities are at risk from outbreaks of pests and pathogens, persistent drought, and the buildup of hazardous fuels. Urbanization and development patterns are placing more homes and communities near fire-prone landscapes, leading to more destructive and costly wildland fires. In 2020, wildland fires burned more than 10.1 million acres and resulted in more than \$2 billion in suppression expenditures.

We need to continue to fund the work of fighting fires on the ground. The VFA and the SFA are essential wildfire risk reduction and protection programs within the USDA Forest Service's (USFS) State and Private Forestry (S&PF) program area. The important work accomplished through SFA and the VFA programs (also referred to as the National Fire Capacity and Rural Fire Capacity programs) helps decrease total federal emergency wildland fire suppression costs and reduce the threat of fire to communities on public and private lands.

SFA is an important federal mechanism for assisting states and local fire departments in responding to wildland fires and in conducting land management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. The program helps train state and local first responders who are often first to arrive at a wildland fire incident, as well as equip them with the tools they need to put wildland fires out efficiently and safely.

For example, in FY 2018 the SFA program provided over \$28 million in funding for hazardous fuels treatments, benefiting 1,065 communities in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). This

funding led directly to the treatment of 49,400 acres of hazardous fuels, with another 184,808 acres treated with leveraged funding from partners. Additionally, roughly \$3.7 million in assistance was provided to conduct 3,882 risk assessments and fire management planning projects in 2,873 communities. In FY 2018, SFA funding assisted nearly 13,000 communities through a variety of different activities, including funding training for 97,210 firefighters.

The localized support provided by SFA is crucial because approximately 80 percent of wildland fires burn within state and local fire department jurisdictions. Even when it comes to wildland fires on federal lands, SFA-supported crews and apparatus are often the first to respond.

Increases in SFA funding will help expand wildland fire preparedness and mitigation capacity for state forestry agencies. Attacking fires when they are small is the key to reducing fatalities, injuries, loss of homes and cutting federal firefighting costs. The need for increased funding for fire suppression on federal lands has broad support. The need to increase fire suppression funding for state and private lands, where many fires that impact federal lands begin, is just as urgent. **With that in mind, in FY 2022, we urge you to provide \$88.5 million for the State Fire Assistance program.**

The VFA program provides support to volunteer fire departments protecting communities with populations of 10,000 or fewer residents. National needs assessment survey data shows that fire departments protecting smaller communities tend to lack adequate resources and rely more on volunteer staffing compared to departments protecting communities with larger populations. Fire departments that regularly respond to wildland fires face particularly acute resource challenges as the equipment, training, and apparatus used to fight wildland fire is almost entirely different from that used to fight structure fires. The VFA program helps bridge these resource gaps for thousands of fire departments across the country.

VFA ensures adequate capacity to respond to wildland fires, reducing the risk to communities, people, homes and property, and firefighters. This capacity is critical because these state and local resources are the first responders to more than 80% of wildland fires – whether on state, federal or private lands. According to the USFS, during FY 2018, the VFA program provided assistance to 13,959 communities, trained 21,868 firefighters, expanded or organized 48 fire departments, and purchased, rehabilitated, or maintained nearly \$11 million in equipment. **In FY 2022, we urge you to provide no less than \$20 million for the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program.**

We appreciate the difficult task the Committee faces in the current budget climate. It is important to remember, however, that these vital programs safeguard human life, habitat, and property, and reduce the overall cost of wildland fire management. Accordingly, we urge you to support funding for these critical programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Mike Bost  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Andy Barr  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Cliff Benz  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Dusty Johnson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Barry Moore  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Katie Porter  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

/s/  
John Yarmuth  
Member of Congress

