

February 25, 2022

The Honorable Kim Schrier  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1123 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1211 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Schrier and Bost,

The undersigned organizations appreciate your ongoing support for critical forestry and wildfire programs, in particular your support for State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA), two programs of key interest to our organizations. With this in mind, we would like to ask for your assistance on an issue impacting the budgets and future delivery of these programs.

Fiscal Year 2022 is the first year since 2011 that Congress will be implementing Community Project Funding and Congressionally Directed Spending (aka earmarks). Among the eligible Budget Line Items (BLI) for earmarks are several State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs within the US Forest Service budget, including SFA and VFA. These programs recognize the essential role of state and local governments and volunteer fire departments in responding to and managing wildland fires, and help to ensure these entities can respond effectively to wildland fires on all jurisdictions, including federal lands.

While both the House-passed and Senate-proposed Interior Appropriations bills for FY22 include earmarks, each chamber proposes a different method for handling the funding. Each has different ramifications on the base funding for these programs when compared to FY21.

In the House bill, each S&PF program earmark is funded through the eligible program BLIs, resulting in a significant decrease in the base program funding for that BLI. By contrast, the Senate bill would fund S&PF program earmarks through a separate “Forest Resource Information Analysis” BLI, which would not result in any decreases in base program funding. The total funding proposed for House and Senate SFA earmarks for FY22 combined is over \$11 million dollars. If funded under the House method, the SFA BLI would see roughly a 15% reduction in funding for FY22 compared to FY21 that would be felt in all states across the country. **We would appreciate your help in asking the Conference Committee to adopt the Senate method of funding S&PF Community Project Funding and Congressionally Directed Spending Proposals in the Interior-Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for FY22 in order to avoid base program impacts.**

The SFA and VFA programs are the fundamental federal assistance programs that state, local, and volunteer fire departments use to develop and enhance preparedness and response capabilities for responding to wildland fires and in conducting management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. SFA also helps train and equip local first responders who are often first to arrive at a wildland fire incident and who play a crucial role in keeping fires and their costs as minimal as possible. Attacking wildfires when they are small is the key to reducing fatalities, injuries, loss of homes, and cutting federal fire-fighting costs.

These programs recognize the essential role of State and local governments in responding to and managing wildland fires and help to ensure these entities can respond effectively to wildland fires on all jurisdictions, including federal lands. They provide crucial financial and technical assistance to support State and local fire management activities, including preparedness, planning, training, hazardous fuels treatments, and the purchase and maintenance of equipment. Continued support and sufficient funding are needed for the SFA and VFA programs. We appreciate your continued support in asking the Conference Committee to support the FY22 House and Senate marks for SFA at \$75 million and VFA at \$20 million.

Once again, we are asking that the Conference Committee adopts the Senate method of funding S&PF Community Project Funding and Congressionally Directed Spending Proposals in the Interior-Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for FY22. Thank you for any support you can give us in this effort.

Sincerely,

Congressional Fire Services Institute

International Association of Fire Chiefs

National Association of State Foresters

National Volunteer Fire Council