



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Research and Technology Subcommittee Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (R-Va.)

U.S. Fire Administration and Fire Grant Programs Reauthorization: Examining Effectiveness and Priorities

Chairwoman Comstock: The purpose of today's hearing is to review the United States Fire Administration and the Assistance to Firefighters (FIRE) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs.

The hearing will help inform legislation to address current program authorizations that expire on September 30, 2017.

Fire prevention and safety is literally a matter of life and death. In 2015 there were 1.34 million fires reported in the United States, causing over 3,000 civilian deaths and over 15,000 injuries.

In addition to this devastating human loss, fires caused \$14.3 billion in property damage.

As I travel throughout my district and visit with firefighters and paramedics, I am constantly reminded of the sacrifices these brave men and women make on a daily basis to protect their fellow citizens in our community. Last year, sadly 69 of those brave men and women lost their lives in the line of duty.

Fire prevention has improved dramatically in the last 40 years since Congress passed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act in 1974, which created the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and the National Fire Academy (NFA), but these numbers are too high.

USFA and NFA are tasked with data collection, public education, as well as research and training efforts, to help to reduce fire deaths and make our communities and residents safer.

We will hear from the acting administrator of the U.S. Fire Administration today about how the agency works to fulfill its mission and learn how we can enhance its efforts to improve fire safety in the United States.

Firefighting activities and funding are primarily the responsibility of states and local communities. However, for the last 15 years the federal government has awarded competitive federal grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) organizations to help address a variety of equipment, training, and other firefighter-related and EMS needs.

FIRE Act awards provide funding for equipment and training to ensure the safety of our nation's first responders.

SAFER Act awards help departments address hiring, recruiting and retaining firefighters to help maintain and increase the number of trained firefighters in local communities.

I know that many professional and volunteer departments in my district rely on these grants so they can continue to provide high quality fire and emergency services to the community.

A fine member of one of those departments is here today, Captain John Niemiec, from the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. I look forward to hearing his testimony on the needs of the firefighters in his department and around the country.

We have a panel representing state and local fire departments and organizations from around the country – Washington State, Kansas, Louisiana and Illinois. All have different needs – and I look forward to their input on how we can improve the fire safety in all communities and support our nation's first responders.

Last month the horrific Grenfell Tower fire in London that killed over 80 people reminded us we cannot take fire safety for granted. Closer to home, it was just two years ago that a Metro fire injured 70 and killed a Virginia resident who was a grandmother of three.

In each case, first responders ran towards the flames and prevented additional lives from being lost.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to move timely legislation to ensure our nation's firefighters and paramedics have the tools they need to fight and prevent fire.

And with that, I look forward to hearing the testimonies of our witnesses.

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