

American Ambulance Association * Congressional Fire Services Institute * International Association of Fire Chiefs * International Association of Fire Fighters * National Association of Counties * National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians * National Association of Towns and Townships * National Fire Protection Association * National Rural Health Association * National Volunteer Fire Council

April 1, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Granger, and Vice Chairman Shelby:

On behalf of the American Ambulance Association, Congressional Fire Services Institute, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, National Association of Counties, National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, National Association of Towns and Townships, National Fire Protection Association, National Rural Health Association, and the National Volunteer Fire Council, thank you for providing \$7.5 million in funding for the Rural EMS Training and Equipment Assistance (REMSTEAs) Program, also known as the SIREN grant, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. While we appreciate this second consecutive year of funding increases, we are concerned this appropriation level does not sufficiently meet the need that exists based on the immense number of award applications that SAMHSA received. The continued COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) has also further constrained budgets for rural emergency medical services (EMS) agencies. Our organizations recommend that you reauthorize and provide \$20 million for the SIREN/REMSTEAs program in FY 2023 in order to meet the critical need that exists in rural communities across the United States.

The SIREN/REMSTEAs program provides crucial support to underfunded fire and emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in rural areas. A strong funding level of \$20 million will allow this program to assist EMS agencies in recruiting and training personnel, procuring EMS

equipment and medications, and expanding their capacity for treating critically ill and injured patients in their communities.

Fire departments and EMS agencies respond to more than 20 million calls for emergency service each year. In most rural communities, these first responders are serving as volunteers for agencies that are largely self-funded. The limited tax base of these communities forced these fire departments and EMS agencies rely upon fundraisers such as raffles, barbeques, and bingo to purchase ambulances, obtain emergency medications and equipment, and train their volunteers to serve as emergency medical technicians and paramedics. The funding challenges facing these agencies are compounded by the chronic under-reimbursement of EMS agencies by Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial insurers.

In an effort to assist these agencies in caring for ill and injured patients, Congress reauthorized and revised the SIREN/REMSTEA grant program as part of the 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334). This newly reauthorized version of the grant program ensures that funds are provided directly to EMS agencies and are focused on helping these agencies have the equipment, vehicles, medication, and staffing needed to save lives. The continued loss of healthcare providers in rural areas, coupled with longer patient transport distances to hospitals and the continued impact of opioid overdoses, places EMS agencies in a precarious position as a safety net for their communities. The SIREN/REMSTEA program is a unique opportunity to ensure that these rural EMS agencies have what they need to save lives and respond to emergencies.

Our organizations appreciated Congress' support for the SIREN/REMSTEA program which was demonstrated in the \$5.5 million in funding that was appropriated to the program for FY 2021. This initial funding level was key to allowing SAMHSA to make available 27 funding awards last year. Unfortunately, SAMHSA received more applications than could be funded based on the \$5.5 million appropriation for FY22. Due to the clear need from the previous award cycle, as well as the immense financial pressures that the COVID-19 PHE continues to place on EMS agencies across the nation, our organizations strongly urge Congress to reauthorize and increase the funding level for SIREN to \$20 million FY 2023.

Thank you again for your support for strengthening rural fire and emergency medical services agencies. Our organizations look forward to continuing to work with you to address the health needs of rural communities across the United States.

Sincerely,

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