

Please Support FY2023 Funding for The Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Law

Request

The SIREN Act passed both Houses of Congress as part of the [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#) and was signed into law on December 20, 2018. This law creates a grant program for public and non-profit EMS agencies and fire departments in rural areas to support the recruitment, retention, education, and equipment for EMS personnel. Rural EMS agencies and fire departments often lack the resources to pay for even basic operational needs. The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, creating a crisis for EMS in many rural areas.

Please ask your lawmakers in the Senate and House to share their support with the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to reauthorize and fund the Siren Act at \$20 million for FY2023 to provide much needed grants and resources to already strained EMS agencies working to provide life-saving medical care to the patients in their communities.

Background

Across the country, in large urban areas as well as small rural communities, Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) have been serving on the frontlines of our nation's war against the COVID-19 pandemic. While the lack of federal investment in our nation's EMS system has always been a challenge, the pandemic has exacerbated the challenge so much so that many EMS systems in our country are at the breaking point. Most communities are facing crisis-level shortages of EMS personnel and many communities have been impacted by agency closures.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has reinforced the great need for increased federal support for EMS in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bill for SIREN grants. Also known as the Rural EMS Equipment and Training Assistance (REMSTEA) program, within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), these funds are focused on ensuring rural and underserved areas have access to the EMS essential to every community.

This grant program supports public and nonprofit rural EMS agencies in their efforts to train and recruit staff; provide education to satisfy certification requirements; and purchase life-saving equipment, from naloxone to new ambulances. Rural EMS agencies are a lifeline to healthcare services for residents in small towns, farming communities and frontier areas. Yet, rural EMS providers face myriad difficulties in recruiting, and retaining, personnel, securing expensive equipment, and medications.

Rural EMS agencies and fire departments often lack the resources to pay for even basic operational needs. Yet, these agencies are a lifeline to the healthcare system for residents, who on average are older, have higher rates of chronic illness, and lower incomes. To help address this challenge, in 2018, the Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Act authorized – for five years – the Rural EMS Equipment and Training Assistance (REMSTEA) grant program. operated by fire departments—

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rural EMS faced challenges in delivering quality emergency response and service coordination, in part, due to recent declines in primary care and hospital service availability, greater distances between healthcare facilities, and low reimbursement rates. Presently, the ongoing public health emergency has exacerbated these issues. In addition, EMS agencies face ever-greater responsibilities—preparing for disasters and bioterror threats, supporting the needs of an aging population, and serving on the front lines of the opioid crisis.

SIREN grants provide direct assistance to these agencies to purchase the PPE needed to protect EMS practitioners and firefighters as well as medical supplies to care for COVID-19 patients. They also support volunteer recruitment, retention, and training efforts.

In recognition of the great need for emergency services in rural areas, and the critical role EMS personnel serve across the country, in FY 2020 and 2021, SAMHSA awarded REMSTEA grants ranging from \$92,000 to \$200,00 to approximately 27 EMS agencies in multiple states for recruitment and training purposes. In December 2021, SAMHSA announced plans to award another 27 rural EMS applicants for 2022. This grant is supported by a multitude of national EMS and Fire organizations.

Funding History

FY2020 \$5 million, FY2021 \$5.5 million, FY2022 \$7.5 million