

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**COMMITTEE
ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
Research and Technology Subcommittee**

**Reauthorizing the U.S. Fire Administration and Fire
Grant Programs: Evaluating Effectiveness and
Preparedness for Modern Challenges**

MAY 11, 2023 – 2:00 P.M.

**TESTIMONY
OF
KEVIN S. REARDON – STATE FIRE MARSHAL OF OHIO**

Good afternoon, Chair Collins, Ranking Member Stevens, and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Kevin Reardon and I have been a member of the fire service for over four decades and currently serve as the State Fire Marshal for the state of Ohio.

It is my pleasure and honor to be with you today to support the reauthorization of the budget for the United States Fire Administration (USFA). The impact that the USFA has on states such as Ohio is significant.

In Ohio, there are 1,180 fire departments, serving a population of 11.5 million people. The vast majority of which are volunteer fire departments.

Like many states, the fire service in Ohio is struggling with retention and recruitment problems that are challenging and urgent. I have talked with many fire chiefs that express frustration and a sense of urgency because without a consistent influx of new personnel, they know the delivery of emergency services will be impacted by not having an adequate number of responding firefighters.

For career fire departments this will create overtime issues which can lead to firefighter burnout if relied on for an extended period of time. This very same issue is even more challenging for volunteer firefighters who count on community members for their membership.

This is why the Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grant (SAFER) is so important. Recently, Ohio had 22 fire departments, large and small, receive grant funding.

This funding gives the receiving communities the opportunity to add personnel to instantly make a difference. These communities know the addition of new personnel will help keep the fire department staffed with an adequate number of trained firefighters now and into the future.

Another long-standing concern I hear frequently focuses on the issue of equipment. Having the proper equipment is necessary for any fire department because it helps them accomplish so much. Everything from forcible entry to advanced vehicle extrication tools and a host of other equipment helps the department be successful and ultimately saves lives.

Providing the proper tools and equipment for some fire departments is a major investment. The cost of a new pumper truck can be \$600,000 or more. A ladder truck can cost as much as \$1 million or more.

For the years 2020 and 2021, 649 Ohio fire departments received Assistance to Firefighter Grants (AFG). These grants provided millions of dollars to fire departments for apparatus and various other types of equipment to help increase their capabilities to serve their citizens. Without funding from the AFG program, these communities would be left on their own to fund equipment that in some cases simply would not be purchased. The usefulness of the equipment or the need for it is never a concern, the cost is always a concern.

As you can tell from the examples provided, the SAFER and AFG grants make a significant difference to fire departments large and small throughout the state of Ohio.

For the years 2021 and 2022, the total grant funding provided by the AFG grant and the SAFER grant is almost \$55 million. This funding is critical to states like Ohio. This funding is not only an investment in communities, but also an investment in promoting and maintaining the safety of our citizens.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the USFA for conducting the Summit on Fire Prevention and Control and for sharing the outcome of that summit with the fire service at large.

The outcome of the summit and its recommendations have become the foundation of the fire service national strategy being promoted by the USFA. As the Fire Marshal for the state of Ohio, I believe this is a logical and reasonable approach to begin addressing some of the long-standing issues continuing to gain the attention of our profession and policymakers in every state.

The issue of behavioral health and the continued increase in the rate of firefighter, EMT and paramedic suicides is shocking. We continue to see these numbers outpace those who are lost in the line of duty.

These are just a few examples of the fire service national strategy that are needed and will serve to save the lives of current and future first responders.

I am honored to be here, and I appreciate the opportunity to offer my support for the reauthorization of the budget for the U.S. Fire Administration. Thank you.