



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON **SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Haley Stevens (D-MI)
of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology**

Subcommittee on Research and Technology Hearing:

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

May 11, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Collins, for holding this important hearing.

Although fire loss has improved significantly over the past 25 years, the fire problem in the United States remains serious. The United States still has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world. It is clear we still have work to do to prevent these fires and their deadly consequences.

It's been a particularly bad year for home fires in my own state of Michigan. According to the Michigan Fire Inspectors Society, home fires have been up significantly. It's only 5 months into 2023, and Michigan has already experienced an 11% increase in fires compared with this time of the year in the last 5-year average.

While incidents are up in homes, there also have been several notable fires at businesses across metro Detroit in the past few years. My own district experienced a fire that burned down the Oakland Hills Country Club – a fixture that had been in the community for generations. The 99-year-old clubhouse was one of the oldest all-wooden structures in Michigan and was where I worked as a hostess the summer after high school to save up money for college. Fire crews from several cities worked together for over 24 hours to fully extinguish the blaze. To this day, I am extremely thankful that no one was injured.

Before continuing, I do want to recognize the fire service professionals in the room today. Our firefighters and first responders are some of the bravest among us – fearlessly protecting our homes, businesses, schools, and families from catastrophe. First responders save lives while risking their own, each and every day. Our fire service professionals deserve adequate and reliable support from Congress. You all represent the backbone of our communities and I want to thank you and your families for your service.

We are here today to discuss the need for reauthorization of the U.S. Fire Administration, or USFA, and the grant programs known as Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, or AFG, and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant Program, or SAFER. I am proud to report that when I host grant workshops for community members in my District, our local fire departments are often the most engaged in the discussions. And I have seen firsthand the impact of the SAFER and AFG grants.

The U.S. fire service at large plays a critical role in protecting the health and safety of our citizens, communities, and critical infrastructure. The USFA and associated grant programs are critical pieces of

that puzzle. Under the fiscal year 2024 Presidential Budget Request, USFA would receive a much needed, but still insufficient, budget increase of 3.5 percent. The AFG and SAFER grant programs would each receive a budget increase of 10 million dollars. This still falls far below the funding levels required for these programs to realize their full potential. I encourage my colleagues to continue to support authorization levels that reflect the demand for these programs and their lifesaving impact on the ground.

As the Ranking Member of the Research & Technology subcommittee, I am eager to hear more about the fire community's priorities for research and development. The fire community is on the brink of significant advancements in technology, protocol, and workforce protection. I believe one of the most urgent is the establishment of a comprehensive fire fighter cancer strategy that invests in research and eliminates PFAS exposure on the job. The development of PFAS-free alternatives for protective gear is critical to protect firefighters from long-term health impacts such as cancer. NIST just released an important analysis of PFAS in turnout gear. I'd like to hear more about USFA's role in research to develop alternative textiles. In addition, USFA is requesting additional funds to help implement a next generation data system that will modernize and advance predictive analytics and risk measurement capabilities to enhance the fire service's ability to prevent and respond to emergencies. I look forward to learning more about fire-related technology gaps keeping us from getting closer to zero fire-related deaths.

Thank you again for being here today and sharing how Congress can provide the support you need to effectively protect our first responders and our communities.

Thank you. I yield back.