

OPENING STATEMENT
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of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
“*U.S. Fire Administration and Fire Grant Programs Reauthorization:
Examining Effectiveness and Priorities*”
July 12, 2017

Thank you Chairwoman Comstock. The authorizations for the U.S. Fire Administration Assistance to Firefighters Grant, or AFG, program as well as the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, or SAFER Grant program, expire in just two months; without Congressional action both programs will terminate on January 2, 2018, under sunset provisions included in the last reauthorization. I hope this Committee will work to get a bill to the President’s desk before that time to reauthorize these programs. I thank our distinguished panelists for being here today and for their service in keeping the American public safe from fire and other hazardous threats.

In the early 1970s, fires claimed 12,000 Americans lives per year and caused \$11 billion in damage, making the U.S. the leader of all major industrialized countries in per capita deaths and property loss from fire. A 1973 report by the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control titled *America Burning*, recommended the establishment of the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Academy.

Thanks in large part to the effortS of those institutions, the nation is making progress in lowering fire fatalities. Today’s rate of just over 3,000 civilian fire deaths per year is significantly lower than in the 1970s, but it is still one of the highest in the industrialized world. Unfortunately, it will be difficult to reduce fire fatalities and property loss without adequate funding of the Fire Administration and fire grant programs. While appropriated funding levels have remained somewhat flat for the last few years, these levels are well below program authorizations. Critical areas such as firefighter safety, fire protection, and fire data collection and analysis, all of which assist fire service professionals in the field and help keep communities safe, are underfunded.

Career, volunteer, and combination fire departments all face challenges in meeting their day-to-day needs. Local fire departments are the boots on the ground for fire prevention and protection, but when state budgets do not allow for adequate funding to hire firefighters and ensure proper training and access to life-saving protective gear and equipment, there is a Federal role in providing funding and technical assistance. The *Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012* made significant changes to the fire grant programs to address some of these funding and technical obstacles. Changes included the distribution of AFG fire grant funding among the various types of fire departments, reducing the cost share requirement for smaller departments, and waiving the matching requirements for less affluent communities.

Whether in a booming local economy or a struggling one, many of today’s fire departments do more than fight fire – they respond to medical calls, hazardous materials calls, and calls about

other hazardous situations, such as an active shooter. It is critical that the more than one million firefighters across the nation have access to proper training to protect the public and themselves while doing a very tough job. The National Fire Academy curriculum reflects current firefighter duties to help fire and emergency professionals prepare for all-hazards responses. Achieving successful outcomes in all-hazards responses often requires the use of advanced firefighting technologies. Federal agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the National Science Foundation along with the university research community, are investing in fire-related research, including first responder protective equipment, health and safety monitoring of emergency responders, and smart information and communications technologies for real-time situational awareness. I look forward to Dr. Horn's testimony on how these technologies help firefighters and what research needs and capability gaps require further investment.

I look forward to hearing our panel discuss the effects of these changes and others to the fire service community, and what the Committee should consider as we look at reauthorizing these programs. Thank you for taking the time to appear before us today.

Thank you Chairwoman, I yield back.