

August 31, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
United States Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Fire and Emergency Services Districts, COVID-19 and Wildfire, Hurricanes

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

On behalf of more than 6,000 special districts providing fire and emergency response to millions of Americans, we, the undersigned leaders of fire and emergency services associations, ask that you urgently and expeditiously include COVID-19 relief for special districts, as local governments, in the upcoming relief package pending negotiations.

As you read this letter, thousands of firefighters and emergency responders from our special districts are responding to wildfires ravaging the western United States. These men and women are working tirelessly to battle flames, save lives and livelihoods, protect property, and defend entire communities from devastation. Emergency services districts along the Gulf Coast are dealing with the aftermath of a major hurricane to aid search, rescue, and emergency response amidst extreme conditions. For localities they serve, they are always first to respond to fire and medical emergencies – with elevated risk to their own health and safety due to COVID-19.

These services are among the most critical at any given time. Yet, while city and county governments received millions of dollars in federal relief earlier this year, **most of these fire and emergency services districts have not received, will not receive, or are still uncertain whether they will receive Coronavirus Relief Fund monies, further compounding their ability to handle simultaneous crises.**

Special purpose governments providing emergency services vary from small to mid-size. Some operate with limited staff while others are staffed with volunteers. These special districts have incurred disproportionate amounts of unexpected COVID-19-related expenses in response to COVID-19. In fact, many report unbudgeted COVID-19 expenses totaling more than half of their annual operating revenues or, worse, exceeding their annual operating revenues. **The pandemic has strained these essential community services, compounding the danger of the wildfire and hurricane seasons we knew were coming.**

More than 33,000 wildland fires burning more than 2.3 million acres so far this year have strained resources available to serve and protect communities throughout America. We are only at the beginning of the 2020 wildfire season and just halfway through the traditional hurricane season, and the worst may be yet to come. **With great concern, we respectfully request you incorporate the bipartisan Special Districts Provide Essential Services Act (S. 4308, H.R. 7073) into the federal relief bill currently pending negotiations.** This legislation will give special districts – including fire and emergency/EMS districts – certain access to future appropriations of the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

S. 4308 and H.R. 7073, the Special Districts Provide Essential Services Act, would meet the needs of special districts and their essential emergency workers with the following provisions (of S. 4308):

- **Allows special districts direct access to the Coronavirus Relief Fund.** The bill requires states to distribute five percent of future Coronavirus Relief Fund allocations that they receive to special districts within 60 days of receiving funds from the U.S. Treasury. Special districts would have to apply and demonstrate need based on revenue losses and COVID-19 related expenditures, which governors or their designated state agencies must certify.

- **Creates limits to allocations** such that a special district may not receive funding that exceeds the amount the district expended in any quarter of 2019. However, special districts providing services that the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency deems to be within a “critical infrastructure sector” would be exempt from limitations, including fire and emergency services districts.
- **Provides flexibility for states with excess funds reserved for special districts** that make a good faith effort to distribute funds to districts within 60 days of receipt from the U.S. Treasury.
- **Defines “special district”** as a “political subdivision of a State, formed pursuant to general law or special act of the State, for the purpose of performing one or more governmental or proprietary functions.” With the multitude of services that special districts throughout the country deliver, it is important to have a clear understanding of what is – and what is not – a special district. The definition in the bill was developed through a collaborative and consensus-driven process by leading local service specialists across the nation.

We and the emergency services agencies we represent thank you for your leadership and for your consideration on this urgent matter as we fight multiple disasters across our nation. We stand ready to work with you on this important need moving forward.

Sincerely,



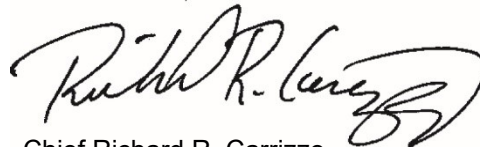
Candy McCullough
President
National Association of Fire and Emergency Officials



Cliff Avery
Executive Director
Texas State Association of Fire and Emergency Districts



Fire Chief Jeffrey D. Johnson, Ret.
Chief Executive Officer
Western Fire Chiefs Association



Chief Richard R. Carrizzo
President and Chairman of the Board
International Association of Fire Chiefs



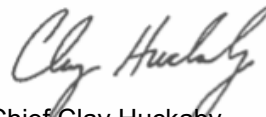
John Flynn
Executive Director
Arizona Fire Districts Association



Genoa Ingram
Executive Director
Oregon Fire District Directors' Association



Michael Newberry
President
Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts



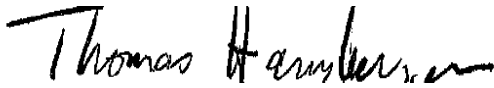
Chief Clay Huckaby
President
Texas Fire Chiefs Association



Jeff Griffin
Executive Director
Oregon Fire Chiefs Association



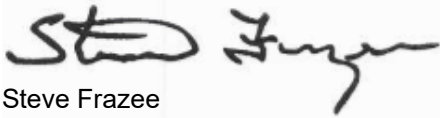
Bonnie M. Jones
President
Montana Fire Trustees Association



Thomas Harnesberger
Secretary, Legislative Committee Chairman
Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts



Steve Wright
Executive Director
Washington Fire Chiefs



Steve Frazee
President
Idaho State Fire Commissioners' Association



Chief Tom DeMint
President
Colorado State Fire Chiefs




Joshua M. Green
General Manager
Cosumnes Community Services District



Timothy Smith
President
Kansas State Association of Fire Chiefs



Scott Frandsen
President
Missouri Association of Fire Chiefs



Rich Cowger
President
Montana State Fire Chiefs Association



Keith Murray
President
Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association



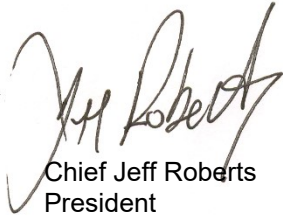
Chief Steve Kovacs
President
Fire Districts Association of California



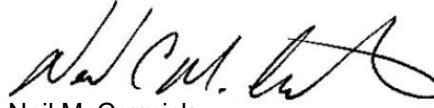
Chief Scott Freitag
President
Arizona Fire Chiefs Association



Karen Buhr
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Chief Jeff Roberts
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Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs




Neil McCormick
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Ann Terry
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Special Districts Association of Colorado



Fred Crawford
Executive Director
Florida Association of Special Districts



Frank Stratton
Executive Director
Special Districts Association of Oregon



LeGrand Bitter
Executive Director
Utah Association of Special Districts

CC: Arizona Congressional Delegation, Senator Kyrsten Sinema, Senator Martha McSally
California Congressional Delegation, Senator Diane Feinstein, Senator Kamala Harris
Colorado Congressional Delegation, Senator Michael Bennet, Senator Cory Gardner
Florida Congressional Delegation, Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Rick Scott
Idaho Congressional Delegation, Senator Michael Crapo, Senator James Risch
Illinois Congressional Delegation, Senator Richard Durbin, Senator Tammy Duckworth
Kansas Congressional Delegation, Senator Pat Roberts, Senator Jerry Moran
Louisiana Congressional Delegation, Senator Bill Cassidy, Senator John Kennedy
Massachusetts Congressional Delegation, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Ed Markey
Michigan Congressional Delegation, Senator Debbie Stabenow, Senator Gary Peters
Missouri Congressional Delegation, Senator Roy Blunt, Senator Josh Hawley
Montana Congressman Greg Gianforte, Senator Jon Tester, Senator Steve Daines
New Jersey Congressional Delegation, Senator Bob Menendez, Senator Cory Booker
Oregon Congressional Delegation, Senator Ron Wyden, Senator Jeff Merkley
Texas Congressional Delegation, Senator John Cornyn, Senator Ted Cruz
Utah Congressional Delegation, Senator Mike Lee, Senator Mitt Romney
Washington Congressional Delegation, Senator Patty Murray, Senator Maria Cantwell