



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Stakeholder Perspectives on OSHA's Proposed Rule to Update the Fire Brigades Standard

June 4, 2024

For 26 years, I served as a volunteer firefighter in my community. I know the sacrifices of firefighters, and I applaud our fire service witnesses here today for your continued service to your communities. Thank you for the sacrifices you and your family make to help those in need. Given the threats our firefighters face in their daily work, robust safety standards are important. The challenges and risks firefighters face, especially in volunteer and rural settings, can be immense.

I commend the Biden Administration for seeking to help first responders. The new proposed OSHA rule to update the Fire Brigades Standard is designed to benefit firefighters by including provisions for mental health support and addressing other often-overlooked health concerns. This holistic approach ensures that our firefighters receive comprehensive care, promoting their physical and psychological well-being. The Biden Administration is doing the right thing by extending the comment period for proposed rule to ensure that stakeholders have ample opportunity to provide input.

The American first responder community is strong, and it deserves the utmost support from Congress. However, under the House Republican leadership, a 10% cut was implemented to the full suite of FEMA grants for FY 24 appropriations, which included cuts to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSP), and the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) for Fiscal Year 2024.

While cuts to the grants have been proposed by both Republican and Democratic Administrations, for nearly a decade Congress has resisted cuts to these critically important grant programs. The FY 2024 cuts were a departure from recent precedent and, more importantly, undermine essential support for firefighters, compromising their ability to respond effectively to emergencies and exposing them and communities to greater risk. Reduced funding means fewer resources for critical training, equipment, and staffing, which are vital for ensuring safety and preparedness during emergencies.

Lastly, I want to note that hurricane season started just days ago, and it is predicted to be record-breaking. I would like to encourage this Subcommittee to do more oversight of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's preparation for hurricane season.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978