



SOUTH CAROLINA STATE FIREFIGHTERS' ASSOCIATION

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary of Homeland Security
MS 0525
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528-0525

Dear Madam Secretary,

I write to you today on behalf of the South Carolina State Firefighters' Association and our 17,500 members with an urgent plea to protect and support the funding and the many resources offered by the United States Fire Administration (USFA); specifically, the Public Assistance Program, the National Fire Academy (NFA), National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) that fall under the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend. These divisions in partnership or under the direction of FEMA are not only significant to our members but also for the citizens of South Carolina.

The US Fire Administration's **Public Assistance Program** has allowed for reimbursements during the response to the many natural disasters in South Carolina's history over the years. From the historic flooding in October 2015, the many hurricanes—most recently Helene, to others like Florence, Matthew, and Hugo—to this month's wildfires in Horry County (Covington Drive Fire) that burned more than 2000 acres between March 1-8, 2025 and required the deployment of 53 fire departments, approximately 299 personnel, and 91 fire apparatus throughout South Carolina under SC Firefighter Mobilization, the Public Assistance Program is critical for South Carolinians.

Under the direction of the USFA, our members have had the privilege of attending the numerous courses offered by the **National Fire Academy** - such as Fire Prevention Management, Hazardous Materials, Incident Management, Leadership & Executive Development, Responder Health & Safety, Wildland Urban Interface. These specialized training courses and advanced management programs for middle and top-level fire officers cover disciplines like EMS leadership, quality management, community risk reduction, and emergency resource deployment planning are vital to the betterment of the fire service in South Carolina and the United States.

The NFA stands alone in its educational approach, providing instruction from the nation's foremost experts in emergency services. These instructors bring insights and real-world lessons

that simply cannot be obtained at the local or state level.

Unlike conventional classroom instruction, the NFA fosters an immersive, facilitator-led learning experience, where fire and EMS professionals from across the country engage in critical discussions, problem-solving, and collaborative exercises. This unique approach challenges students to think beyond their local experiences, exposing them to new perspectives, strategies, and best practices that would otherwise remain out of reach.

The opportunities of these courses develop bonds that go beyond regional limitations, creating a nationwide network of fire service leaders who continue to collaborate long after the course ends. These relationships have been instrumental not just to the fire service but to the communities we serve.

The NFA is not just a training center—it is an experience, a leadership incubator, and the foundation for the future of the fire service. It provides professionals at all levels with a space to challenge conventional thinking, expand their perspectives, and elevate their departments' capabilities.

To eliminate or diminish the services offered at the NFA would undermine the very foundation of leadership development in the fire and emergency services. It would weaken national preparedness, reduce knowledge-sharing among departments, and erode the professional pipeline that has sustained the fire service for over four decades.

The long-needed creation of an updated core data standard and an initial operating capability (IOC) platform in collaboration with the USFA, US Department of Homeland Security's (DHU's) Science & Technology (S&T) and the US fire service has launched the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) platform. The NERIS platform-initiated development in May 2023 by the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI) has since been launched with a 12-month nationwide rollout, eventually replacing the legacy National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) as the primary reporting tool for fire and emergency response for the nation's approximately 27,000 fire departments.

NERIS will provide much needed support to the fire service by:

- **Enhanced Resource Advocacy:** NERIS will help departments convey staffing and resource needs by enabling a clearer understanding of the complexity of emergency response.
- **Informed Resource Allocation:** By making geospatial information a core component, departments will be able to make data-informed decisions on the placement of personnel, apparatus, and stations.
- **Risk Insights:** NERIS will provide a shared view of risks at local, state, and national levels and support local risk reduction efforts.
- **Service Performance:** Access to near-real-time data will help departments identify and address gaps.

With the nationwide rollout already underway we must push forward with approved and continued funding and support to provide our community with reliable predictive analytics to support enhanced preparedness and response to all-hazard incidents, wildland urban interface events, community risk reduction efforts and associated resilience and mitigation efforts, and other emergency responses.

I urge you to recognize the immeasurable value of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and to ensure its continued funding and support of the resources that fall under its purview discussed above and many others. The future of the fire service—and the safety of our communities—depends on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randy Arant", written over a diagonal line that crosses through the word "Sincerely,".

Randy Arant, President
South Carolina State Firefighters' Association

cc: The Honorable Lindsey Graham
The Honorable Tim Scott
The Honorable Jim Clyburn
The Honorable Joe Wilson
The Honorable Ralph Norman
The Honorable William Timmons
The Honorable Nancy Mace
The Honorable Russell Fry
The Honorable Sheri Biggs
The Honorable Henry McMaster