

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Mark Amodei
Chair
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lauren Underwood
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Amodei and Ranking Member Underwood,

As you begin to write the Fiscal Year 2026 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we write to respectfully request that you include \$56 million in funding for the National Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Response System. This funding level would meet the true cost of readiness to first responder agencies that comprise each task force. It would also match the amount in the Homeland Security Appropriations bill the House passed on June 28, 2024, following a bipartisan amendment we led.¹

The US&R System has been a vital, nationwide resource since 1989. Operating under the authority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, it is made up of 28 task forces based in 19 states around the country. Each task force is staffed by federal, state and local emergency response agencies that are on call for rapid deployment by FEMA to respond to disasters. Once on site, task force members provide assistance in land- and water-based search and rescue operations, searches of damaged and collapsed structures, emergency medical care, wildfire response, hazardous materials surveys, and lifeline utility assessment and shut-off, to name just a few of the capabilities that each task force is prepared to provide. While deployed, task force personnel operate round the clock in dangerous, life-threatening situations.

Task forces have deployed to some of the most catastrophic and consequential disaster in our nation's history, including the Northridge Earthquake in Los Angeles County in 1994, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, the September 11th attacks in New York and D.C. in 2001, the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster recovery operation in Texas in 2003, Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana in 2005, Hurricane Sandy along the East Coast in 2012, and the wildfires in Maui, Hawaii, in 2023, among many others.

¹ H.Amdt.1012 to H.R.8752, Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2025.

The US&R System is funded through a cost-share arrangement between FEMA, state, and local sponsoring first responder agencies. The agencies that make up each task force are primarily funded through state and local funding sources, and FEMA provides funding to task forces to remain ready for deployment, including through equipment acquisition and maintenance and personnel training. During deployment, task forces primarily pay for their own expenses – in addition to expenses for their local operations as first responders in their own community – and are subsequently reimbursed by FEMA. This funding model means that task forces are stretched extremely thin. They are expected to respond to national disasters well beyond their borders without commensurate funding from the Federal government to maintain their operations.

FEMA provides each task force with about \$1.2 million annually to maintain its deployment readiness. Aside from a modest increase in FY24 of just over an additional \$107,000 per task force, task force readiness funding has remained flat for several years. Yet task force costs continue to rise rapidly due to increased labor and equipment costs, increased frequency of deployments, and an expansion of their expected response capabilities. The true cost to each task force of maintaining its readiness exceeds \$2 million a year, or more than \$56 million total for the US&R System. Despite this, the System was funded at just about \$40 million in FY24.

We respectfully request an increase in funding for the US&R System’s task forces to \$56 million in the base text and report language specifying that this amount is set aside in the FEMA operations and support account for this purpose. To reiterate, the House-pass FY25 Homeland Security Appropriations bill funded task forces at this amount. This will help to make participation in the System sustainable for local fire and EMS departments. Without increased funding, the United States risks losing this critical, life-saving program.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



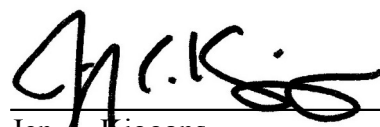
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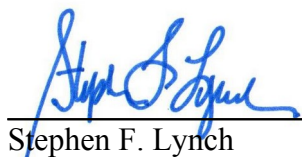
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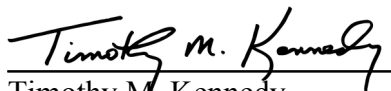
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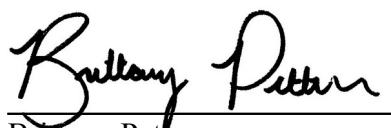
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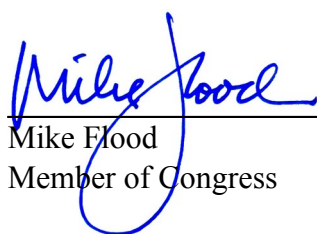
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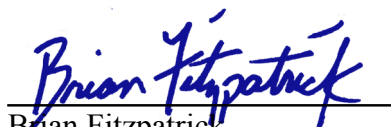
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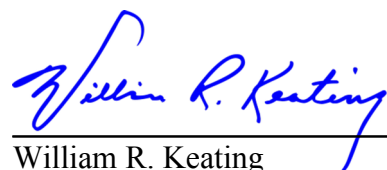
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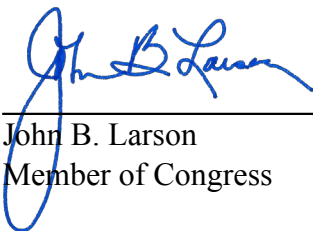
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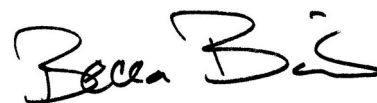
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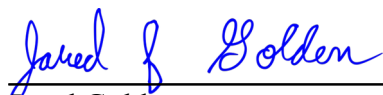
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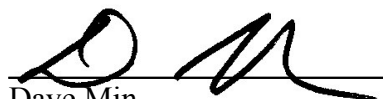
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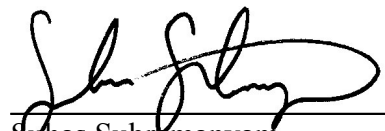
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