



COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**  
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas**

### **Full Committee Hearing**

#### *The Role of AFG and SAFER Grants in COVID-19 Response*

June 12, 2020

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Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson. Good afternoon from the Science Committee hearing room in Washington, DC. We have several members here participating in today's virtual hearing, and I can assure you we are all following CDC guidelines.

In approving virtual hearings, the Rules Committee recommended that House committees make accommodations to ensure the health and safety of participants. A number of committees have held either in-person or hybrid-style hearings in recent weeks. Several of the members of this Committee are here in Washington today, and we have plenty of room. This hearing could have easily followed suit. I urge my good friend Chairwoman Johnson to continue to accommodate the in-person participation of Members going forward.

Meanwhile, I want to welcome and thank our witnesses for joining us in our first official hearing in nearly three months. We are fortunate to have three of our nation's top first responders on the panel to discuss fire and EMS department needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 continues to spread in pockets around the country, our nation's first responders are on the front lines and vulnerable to contracting the virus.

Fire and medical emergencies don't stop during a pandemic. While many Americans have sheltered at home for the last few months, our first responders don't have that option. We must ensure they have the resources and equipment they need to stay safe, healthy, and on the job.

Firefighting activities and funding are primarily the responsibility of states and local communities. However, for the last 18 years, the federal government has awarded competitive federal grants directly to local fire departments and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) organizations to help address a variety of equipment, training, and other related needs.

A-F-G awards provide funding for equipment and training to ensure the safety of our nation's first responders. SAFER awards help departments hire, recruit, and retain firefighters to help maintain and increase the number of trained firefighters in local communities. This Committee led the reauthorization of those programs two years ago, recognizing that it is in the national interest to have well-staffed and equipped fire

departments in case of a national emergency. We didn't anticipate then what that would be, but COVID-19 is now testing our nation's emergency preparedness system.

The CARES Act, which passed on a broad bipartisan basis, included \$100 million in supplemental funds to help fire departments buy or be reimbursed for personal protective equipment. I understand that FEMA is processing those applications and will be making awards in the next couple of weeks. I know that is not as fast as many of us would like, but for a program not designed to make emergency awards, they have moved with rapid speed.

We have witnesses today from organizations and fire departments large and small, from Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois. All Departments have different needs – and I look forward to their input on how we can improve the safety of our men and women on the frontlines during this crisis.

I thank the witnesses for being with us virtually, and for their service to our nation.

I yield back.