



Congress of the United States

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce:

As you prepare the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we ask that you include language to increase firefighter pay to reflect the hazards, risks, and qualifications of our federal wildland firefighters.

Climate change has brought about longer fire seasons—fires burning more land on average each year, more extreme fire behavior, and the increased frequency of fires in the wildland urban interface that impact more homes and communities. Every major wildfire in the U.S. relies on a federal wildfire response with federal wildland firefighters and the vital services their specialized crews provide to protect life and property.

Federal wildland firefighters are paid significantly less than their counterparts at state and local wildland fire agencies. Additionally, the federal government provides advanced-skill units not offered by state or private entities, such as Hotshot Crews, Smokejumpers, Rappellers, Helitack Crews, and Wildland Fire Modules.

Our federal firefighters answer the call of duty, leaving behind their lives and families for months at a time, working an average of 16-hour daily shifts, sleeping in the dirt, with incredibly limited time off to reset and reconnect with loved ones. Our federal firefighting workforce is severely undercompensated for these sacrifices and their ongoing service.

Federal firefighters are classified in a more general “forestry technician” job category, meaning entry level hires often start at a GS-3 salary of \$13.45 an hour. The current firefighter salaries many hardships for our workforce, who put their lives on the line for our protection. We applaud the Biden administration’s efforts to ensure no federal wildfire firefighter makes less than \$15 an hour, while working to address mental health needs and other line-of-duty hazards. Additionally, we are expecting clarity on the new ‘wildland firefighter’ classification next month. We must

continue to coordinate with the Office of Personnel Management to review and increase the pay scale for all federal wildland firefighters to reflect the hazardous conditions they endure.

We request you include the following language in the base text of the FY23 bill:

"New wildland firefighters are primarily classified as "forestry technicians," paid at the GS-3 level. It is the sense of the committee that federal firefighters should be provided with a competitive salary; starting at the GS-4 level, or the equivalent of above \$20 an hour."

Throughout the country, our federal firefighters are answering the call of duty. We ask that you work to include this language in the FY23 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill to ensure that federal wildfire personnel are paid a salary competitive with other wildland firefighting opportunities outside of the federal government. Congress must honor their dedication to protecting homes, livelihoods, and our communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
Member of Congress



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress