

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April XX, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

We appreciate your work to provide support for our nation's police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. However, additional assistance is needed during this crisis. As Congress considers further legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include additional support for our nation's first responders who work in one of the highest risk occupations for COVID-19 exposure.<sup>1</sup> First responders are routinely in physical contact with potentially infected persons and are facing unprecedented volumes of dispatch calls, especially in severely impacted areas.<sup>2</sup>

A short supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for first responders to guard against disease exposure has left many police officers, firefighters, and EMS personnel exposed to the dangers of this crisis. This has resulted in too many across our nation contracting COVID-19, officers being forced to self-quarantine, which has led to staffing shortages.<sup>3</sup> As of April 1 more than 1,400 New York City Police Department (NYPD) employees have contracted COVID-19 with 6,100 in total in quarantine, and 282 New York City Fire Department (FDNY) employees have contracted COVID-19 with 950 in total in quarantine.<sup>4</sup> While New York City is the current epicenter of the U.S. outbreak, many other cities and states with developing outbreaks such as New Jersey<sup>5</sup>, Florida<sup>6</sup>, Detroit<sup>7</sup>, Seattle<sup>8</sup>, Washington D.C.<sup>9</sup>, and several additional states and cities across the nation<sup>10</sup> have reported a significant number of first responders contracting COVID-19 or in self-quarantine.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/15/business/economy/coronavirus-worker-risk.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/28/nyregion/nyc-coronavirus-ems.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.propublica.org/article/emergency-medical-responders-have-lacked-guidance-and-are-stretched-for-supplies-and-personnel-to-combat-coronavirus>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/01/more-than-1000-new-york-city-police-officers-are-infected-with-coronavirus.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/03/700-nj-police-officers-have-tested-positive-for-coronavirus-state-police-leader-says.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.actionnewsjax.com/news/local/jacksonville-area-coronavirus-updates-people-drinking-alcohol-cope-during-pandemic-research-shows/I3DJIWFY2JFVFI6Z7L2AL7KCRM/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.wnem.com/news/detroit-mayor-updates-number-of-first-responders-testing-positive-for-covid-19/article\\_aed777c2-7452-11ea-8cb8-7f4b500357a9.html](https://www.wnem.com/news/detroit-mayor-updates-number-of-first-responders-testing-positive-for-covid-19/article_aed777c2-7452-11ea-8cb8-7f4b500357a9.html)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/seattle-has-booked-an-entire-downtown-hotel-for-first-responders-to-isolate-and-quarantine-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/32-of-dcs-first-responders-test-positive-for-coronavirus/2260241/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-in-several-cities-test-positive-for-coronavirus-stirring-fears-of-spread-among-first-responders/2020/03/28/b88b17f4-6f9a-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-in-several-cities-test-positive-for-coronavirus-stirring-fears-of-spread-among-first-responders/2020/03/28/b88b17f4-6f9a-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html)

As this outbreak develops, many more first responders will undoubtedly contract COVID-19 or be forced to self-quarantine. To support our nation's police officers, firefighters, and EMS personnel serving on the frontlines of this pandemic we urge action on the below items.

- Bolster resources so state and local police, fire, and EMS departments can directly access resources to purchase and be reimbursed for PPE, retain existing employees, and cover overtime, backfill costs, and COVID-19 related paid sick leave through grants at the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and waive grant requirements to ensure funds are eligible for reimbursement of all COVID-19-related expenses and expeditiously reach departments in need. Further, police, fire, and EMS personnel serving in areas most impacted by COVID-19 should receive hazard pay, expeditiously distributed to their employing agency through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- Mandate the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant waivers to Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants recipients for employee retention to aid staffing shortages departments are facing. We urge language retroactively mandating the DHS Secretary grant such waivers for FY19 and FY20 SAFER funds.
- Extend hazard pay to all frontline federal firefighters and law enforcement officers, overtime pay to U.S. Probation Officers, and waive the federal firefighter and law enforcement officer overtime cap under 5 USC § 5547.
- Address the gap in paid sick leave coverage for first responders by mandating that the employing agency, not the employee, provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave should these departments order the employee to self-quarantine due to potential COVID-19 exposure.
- Create a presumption in the Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB) program that a public safety officer's infection of COVID-19 resulted from their employment to clearly establish eligibility for death or disability benefits due to the pandemic.

During a time of crisis, communities rely on local first responders as the first line of defense for protection and emergency response. As you continue to develop further legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include the above items so our nation's first responders can operate at full capacity as we fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

CC:

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Chairman, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Doug Collins, Ranking Member, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman, House Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Mike Rogers, House Committee on Homeland Security