

## **Please Support FY24 Funding for SIREN and S. 265, the *SIREN Reauthorization Act***

### **Request**

The SIREN Act was signed into law on December 20, 2018. This law created a grant program for public and non-profit EMS agencies and fire departments in rural areas to support the recruitment, retention, education, and equipping of EMS personnel. Rural EMS agencies and fire departments often lack the resources to pay for even basic operational needs, and this program is aimed at helping meet some of those needs.

Please ask your lawmakers in the Senate and House to share their support with the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to fund SIREN Act grants at \$20 million for FY2024 to provide much needed resources to already strained EMS agencies working to provide life-saving medical care to the patients in their communities.

The current 5-year authorization for SIREN ends September 2023. In response, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced S. 265, the SIREN Reauthorization Act that would reauthorize the SIREN Act grants for another five years (2024-2028). Please also ask your lawmakers to support this reauthorization.

### **Background**

SIREN grants, also known as Rural EMS Equipment and Training Assistance (REMSTEA) grants, are administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within HHS. In FY 2020 and 2021, the agency awarded grants ranging from \$92,000 to \$200,000 to 27 EMS agencies in multiple states. These grants provide critical support to EMS agencies and fire departments in the most rural parts of our country. In FY 2022, a total of 41 grants were funded. In March 2023, SAMHSA announced plans to make 52 awards to rural EMS applicants.

EMS agencies and fire departments across the United States are facing crisis-level challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel and maintaining their operations in the wake of exponential increases in expenses for medical supplies, equipment, fuel and medications. Increased costs coupled with continued supply-chain delays in obtaining ambulances and other emergency response vehicles, are creating unprecedented challenges for even the most well-resourced EMS agencies. Rural EMS agencies often are forced to rely on community donations to supplement limited funding from municipal or county governments. While donations help rural EMS agencies and fire departments maintain their operations, they have not kept pace with the rising costs that these agencies face. In today's economic environment, EMS agencies and fire departments struggle to stretch their budgets to cover basic medications and supplies. Even common medications like naloxone have seen price increases in the last few years. Declines in primary care and hospital service availability, greater distances between healthcare facilities, and low reimbursement rates have created a perfect storm of financial challenges for rural agencies.

EMS agencies face ever-greater responsibilities—preparing for disasters and public health threats, responding to “routine” emergencies such as heart attacks and vehicle accidents, supporting the needs of an aging population, serving on the front lines of the opioid and fentanyl crisis, and filling healthcare gaps in rural communities created by declining numbers of primary healthcare providers.

The SIREN grant program is a critical lifeline for these budget-challenged, rural EMS agencies and fire departments. SIREN grants have provided much-needed funding to assist these agencies in procuring medication and medical supplies, recruiting and retaining personnel, increasing their levels of service from Basic Life Support to Advanced Life Support, and even replacing older ambulances with newer and safer models. Since the inception of the SIREN program in 2018, nearly 100 communities have been able to use these funds to elevate the level of emergency medical care provided to their residents. These operational improvements and service expansions were only possible with the support of the SIREN program. Undoubtedly, there are countless people whose lives were saved because of Congress' support for the SIREN grants.

While we recognize the difficulty of any funding increase in the current financial environment, please urge Congress to provide \$20 million for SIREN grants in FY 2024. This level of funding will allow SAMHSA to better meet the needs of rural communities and fund more of the applications for assistance that it receives through the annual funding announcement for the SIREN grants. This grant program is supported by a multitude of national EMS and Fire organizations.

Funding History: FY2020 \$5 million, FY2021 \$5.5 million, FY2022 \$7.5 million, FY2023 \$10.5 million

**Contact**

To learn more about S.265 or to co-sponsor, please contact Max Kenner in Senator Durbin's office at [Max\\_Kanner@durbin.senate.gov](mailto:Max_Kanner@durbin.senate.gov) or Maria Olson in Senator Collins' office at [Maria\\_Olson@collins.senate.gov](mailto:Maria_Olson@collins.senate.gov).