



Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grant Program Appropriations

- **Request: Provide a minimum of \$25 million for VFA in FY 2025**

- **What is VFA?**

VFA is a grant program that provides funding to rural fire departments on a 50/50 cost share basis to pay for training, equipment, and protective clothing to help them prepare for wildland fires. VFA is administered by the U.S. Forest Service and funds are distributed by state forestry agencies. In FY 2022, the VFA program provided assistance to 11,372 communities, trained 15,335 firefighters, expanded or organized 55 fire departments, and purchased, rehabilitated, or maintained over \$11.6 million in equipment.

- **Why is VFA important?**

More than 80 percent of initial attacks on wildland fires in the United States are provided by volunteer fire departments that frequently lack the financial resources to adequately equip and train their firefighters. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that the wildland fire suppression services provided by local fire departments are worth approximately \$36 billion annually.

Unfortunately, national fire service needs assessment studies consistently show that agencies serving small communities lack up-to-date equipment and training by wide margins compared with fire departments serving larger, more densely populated communities. When local fire departments are unable to suppress wildland fires during the initial phase, the fires spread, and state and federal firefighters are deployed. This is an extremely expensive process that can cost the federal government anywhere from hundreds of millions to billions of dollars in fire suppression costs in a single year depending on the severity of the fire season.

- **Why should VFA be funded at \$25 million?**

The costs of wildland fire suppression are increasing as commercial and residential development pushes further into the wildland/urban interface (WUI). Providing \$25 million for VFA in FY 2025 would ensure adequate capacity to respond to wildland fires, reducing the risk to communities, people, homes, property, and firefighters.