



National Association of Emergency and Fire Officials

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April 29, 2024

The Honorable Pat Fallon
U.S. House of Representatives
2416 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: NAEFO Support for the *Special District Grant Accessibility Act*

Dear Congressman Fallon:

On behalf of the National Association of Emergency and Fire Officials (NAEFO) – representing the board members of special districts providing emergency and first response services across the nation –, I write to express strong support of H.R. 7525, the *Special District Grant Eligibility Act*.

More than 6,000 special districts provide fire protection, ambulance/EMS, and emergency communication services across 40 states, including more than 360 in Texas. These special districts are independent of other units of local government, have a local tax base to fund emergency services, and are overseen by locally-elected or appointed autonomous governing bodies.

Despite their prevalence, federal law lacks a single definition of, or consistency reference to, “special districts.” As a result, we often face additional, unnecessary hurdles to access federal funding opportunities afforded to general government service providers.

While emergency service districts are eligible for banner federal assistance programs – such as AFG and SAFER – many face significant hardship accessing other funding opportunities for local government services, largely due to a lack of federal recognition and understanding of these government structures. Our emergency services districts often find themselves unable to access programs for community development that could fund station upgrades for health and safety, emergency response on federal lands, mitigation activities, and more. Unfortunately, as a result of the current policy, many of these special districts never received COVID-19 relief and recovery funding despite being on the lines of the public health crisis.

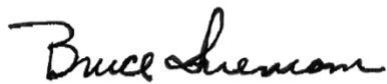
Furthermore, federal law does not recognize special districts to be “geographic units of government,” which results in many special districts’ inability to leverage federally-recognized population data and statistics. This all leads to a difference in how special districts are treated in their access to federally-funded programs for local governments.

The *Special District Grant Accessibility Act* is a simple bill that would serve as the catalyst to resolve this complex issue, providing clarity on what special districts are and placing fire, ambulance, and other emergency services districts on a more level playing field to pursue federal funding opportunities.

NAEFO supports H.R. 7525 as it would formally define “special district” in federal law, and for the direction it provides to federal agencies for implementation over the course of two years. Ultimately, the bill would help our emergency and first-responder service providers have a more level-playing field to access programs afforded to local government counterparts in the time ahead, thus enhancing the public health and safety for tens of millions of Americans across thousands of communities.

We commend your bipartisan leadership on this measure and stand ready to support broader efforts on this legislation. Do not hesitate to reach out to NAEFO for questions and more information on our organization, our emergency services districts, and why we see this legislation as so significant for the nation’s public emergency services. Please contact Cole Arreola-Karr, NAEFO Executive Director, at cole@naefo.org for more.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Suenram". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce Suenram
President
National Association of Emergency and Fire Officials