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**“SUPPORTING OUR FIRST RESPONDERS ACT” AIMS To add $5oM in FEDERAL EMS GRANTS**

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By Sarah Wilson Handler with [www.lexipol.com](http://www.lexipol.com)

On Sept. 28, H.R. 8994 was introduced by Congressman Andy Kim (NJ-03) in the U.S. House of Representatives to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish the Emergency Medical Services Grant Program.

Referred to as the “[Supporting Our First Responders Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8994?s=1&r=7),” the bipartisan legislation (as currently drafted) would provide federal funding for EMS organizations that can demonstrate financial need, cost benefit and the ability to improve medical transport and EMS through the prescribed grant activities. Priority consideration would be given to applicants whose proposals will expand coverage area, improve response times and bolster the organization's ability to provide medical transport and emergency services.

Examples of funding purposes include the following:

* Maintaining or increasing the number of trained front-line EMS responders, including providing salaries and stipends, [wellness and fitness programs](https://www.lexipol.com/solutions/wellness-resources/), and covering or reimbursing costs associated with certification and recertification courses
* Obtaining resources, including purchasing EMS vehicles, PPE, uniforms, medicine and medical supplies
* Modifying facilities
* Any other activity the HHS secretary determines appropriate

As proposed, the HHS secretary would be authorized to appropriate $50 million in annual federal funding over a four-year period, from 2023 through 2027, to carry out the program’s objectives. Additionally, $5 million in technical assistance funding would be appropriated during each fiscal year.

Eligible EMS organizations would include paid or volunteer not-for-profit and for-profit EMS organizations, although not more than 2% of grant awards ($1 million annually) would be rendered to for-profit agencies. Not-for-profit EMS entities would be eligible for up to $300,000 in federal grant funding while for-profit EMS organizations would be capped at $100,000. Further, 20% of all grant awards would be reserved for rural-designated EMS organizations. A “rural area” is defined as a nonmetropolitan statistical area, an area designated as a rural area by any law or regulation of a state, or a rural census tract of a metropolitan statistical area determined by the most recent rural urban commuting area code set by the Office of Management and Budget.

It is important to note that the introduction of this bill represents the first step toward its realization. As of Oct. 20, H.R. 8994 has been referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce for review. While with the committee, there is the possibility that revisions to its existing language will be introduced. Once the committee approves the bill, it will be sent back to the House floor to be debated and updated with any recommended changes. At that time, the bill will be voted on. If the bill passes the U.S. House of Representatives vote, it is then delivered to the U.S. Senate and undergoes many of the same steps as when it was in the House. If the bill passes the Senate, it is then delivered to the president to sign into law. Only once it is signed by the president does the bill become law and the HHS secretary would be deemed authorized to execute the program.

While this important legislation is still in its infancy, it presents an immense opportunity for EMS responders who risk their lives daily in service to their communities. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted discrepancies in access to state and federal grant funding among EMS organizations and that of other first response agencies like police and fire. As a workforce that is consistently on the front lines, ongoing pressures, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the [opioid crisis](https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/opioid-settlement-funding-the-impact-on-first-responders/), have continued to plague this heroic profession, resulting in an overall turnover rate of 30% nationwide, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Now, as inflation is on the rise, increasing day-to-day operational costs, our country’s EMS organizations are grappling with the financial challenges of doing more with less and being met with tough choices that often have life-or-death consequences. Support for this bill would provide the only existing federal funding stream strictly for EMS organizations, ensuring every community continues to have access to high-quality healthcare and that these critical care providers are equipped with the necessary resources to do their jobs.

For alerts on the most up-to-date information and to follow the bill’s advancement toward becoming law, [click here](http://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8994?r=1&s=3).

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