

# **Volunteer First Responder Housing Act**

*Introduced by Senators Baldwin (D-WI), Rounds (R-SD), Tester (D-MT), Capito (R-WV) and Roberts (R-KS)*

Fire departments across the country rely on volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services practitioners to respond to a wide array of emergencies including fires, medical incidents, natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents and other general public service calls. According to the National Fire Protection Association's 2017 U.S. Fire Department Profile, 65 percent of firefighters nationwide are volunteers.

Recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters is critical for thousands of communities, yet local volunteer fire departments, especially departments serving small and rural communities, continue to find it difficult to meet staffing needs and attract younger volunteers.

Recognizing this challenge, the *Volunteer First Responder Housing Act* seeks to open existing affordable housing opportunities to provide an incentive for volunteer firefighters and other responders. The bill expands eligibility for qualified volunteer emergency responders to participate in certain federal housing assistance programs.

The bill makes it possible for more volunteer emergency responders to participate in the Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development. This existing program assists approved lenders in providing loans to low- and moderate- income households to build, rehabilitate or improve a home in eligible rural areas. The bill will allow volunteers to participate in the loan program even if their income exceeds the maximum allowable income level by up to \$18,000.

The bill also makes volunteer emergency responders eligible to participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Good Neighbor Next Door Sales Program. This existing program gives law enforcement officers, teachers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians a 50 percent discount from the list price of a home located in a revitalization area.

The bill is supported by National Volunteer Fire Council, International Association of Fire Chiefs, Housing Assistance Council, National Rural Housing Coalition, National Association of Towns and Townships, National Association of Counties, Wisconsin State Firefighters Association, Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association, Wisconsin Counties Association, and Wisconsin Towns Association.