



July 14, 2023

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Chairman  
Committee on Transportation &  
Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Transportation &  
Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

On behalf of the more than 11,000 chief fire and emergency medical services (EMS) officers of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the nation's volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services, represented by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), we commend you for your bipartisan efforts on H.R. 3935, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act. Moreover, we thank you for your inclusion of core elements of H.R. 1192, the First Responder Aerial Access Act, into the bill. These provisions will make it easier for volunteer fire departments to use tethered unmanned aerial systems (UAS).

The 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act (P.L. 115-254) defined “public actively tethered” unmanned aerial systems as UAS weighing 4.4 lbs. or less and physically tethered to a ground station. The Act directed the FAA to permit the use of public actively tethered UAS under certain conditions without obtaining further certificates or authority from the agency. The FAA subsequently determined that the word “public” in this section only applies to aircraft used by federal, state, or local governments, or a political subdivision of one of those groups. Unfortunately, the current FAA interpretation excludes numerous public safety groups who rely on actively tethered UAS to carry out life-saving operations—like volunteer fire departments. Approximately 65% of the country's fire departments are volunteer-based and thus fall outside the definition of “public” under the FAA's current interpretation.

Through the inclusion of the core elements of H.R. 1192, H.R. 3935 would expand the aperture so that tethered drones may be operated by any public safety organization. It also would require tethered UAS to have increased safety systems to prevent injury in the case of malfunction. Additionally, this bill would allow actively tethered UAS to be flown in zero-grid spaces, expanding public safety groups and first responders' flexibility to utilize UAS technologies when responding to emergencies.

We must ensure that all public safety organizations, including volunteer firefighters, have access to UAS technology, which will increase their ability to save lives. To do so we ask that the full House of Representatives pass H.R. 3935. This important legislation will amend title

49, United States Code, to permit the operation of actively tethered unmanned aerial systems by all first responders.

Sincerely,



Fire Chief Donna M. Black, EFO, CFO  
President and Board Chair  
International Association of Fire Chiefs



Fire Chief Steven W. Hirsch  
Chair  
National Volunteer Fire Council

cc: The Honorable Garret Graves, Chairman, Subcommittee on Aviation  
The Honorable Steve Cohen, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Aviation

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