



April 26, 2024

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science &
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science &
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chair Cantwell & Ranking Member Cruz:

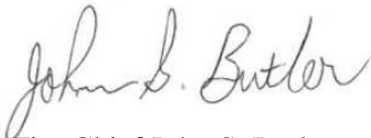
On behalf of the more than 11,000 chief fire and emergency medical services (EMS) officers of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the nation's volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services, represented by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), we commend you for your bipartisan efforts towards a new, multi-year reauthorization of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) programs and policy. As both chambers come together to reconcile their respective bills, we write to you today to urge for the inclusion of **Section 604 "Public safety use of tethered UAS"** ("Section 604") within H.R. 3935, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act in any final conference agreement. These provisions will make it easier for volunteer fire departments to use tethered unmanned aerial systems (UAS) during critical and life-saving public safety missions.

In 2018, Congress passed the FAA Reauthorization Act (P.L. 115-254) which 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 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.


Section 604 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.

Again, we ask that this critically important and lifesaving policy be included in any final FAA Reauthorization conference agreement. We must ensure that all fire departments have access to UAS technology, which will increase the ability of all fire departments to save lives.

Sincerely,



Fire Chief John S. Butler
President and Board Chair
International Association of Fire Chiefs



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
The Honorable Tammy Duckworth, Chairman, Subcommittee on Aviation
The Honorable Jerry Moran, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Aviation

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