



## Congress of the United States

February 20, 2024

The Honorable Randy Moore  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
201 14th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20227

The Honorable Charles Sams  
Director  
National Park Service  
900 Ohio Drive SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Chief Moore and Director Sams:

We thank you for your ongoing commitment to addressing the need for increased pay and benefits for wildland firefighters, to reflect the heroic sacrifice and service they provide to our communities. However, we write to request a prompt written update in response to deeply concerning reports of substandard housing conditions and exorbitant rent increases at housing units that are owned or leased by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and National Park Service (NPS).

As you know, federal agencies do not guarantee housing for federal wildland firefighters. Housing is provided to specific crews based on availability, and in some areas, crews are required to live in government-owned housing. In 2022, the Government Accountability Office published a report on the barriers to wildland firefighter recruitment and retention, which identified the cost associated with a remote duty station, including the costs of federal housing, as a primary barrier. Recently, we have become aware of concerning anecdotal reports from wildland firefighters across the nation that many of these housing units are in unacceptable conditions, and moreover, that rent has increased sharply over the past six months.

While we understand that your respective agencies do not control market conditions with respect to the private housing market, it is unfathomable to significantly increase compulsory rent costs for housing units occupied by federal wildland firefighters, many of whom earned minimum wage incomes before the temporary pay increase provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. While many of us in the Congress continue to work to secure a permanent pay solution, federal agencies must take immediate actions to mitigate these rent increases and provide affordable housing to federal wildland firefighters.

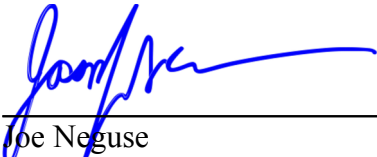
Wildland firefighters sacrifice everything to protect our communities from property damage, mass evacuations, threats to air quality, and the tragic loss of human life. They endure exceptionally difficult work conditions, often living in remote areas for weeks on end, inhaling hazardous smoke, and enduring high temperatures, all the while working for up to 18 hours a day to protect our families. Our firefighters continue to be severely undercompensated for these sacrifices, and they deserve to rest and have a sense of normalcy when returning from a shift.

To better understand the quality of federal housing and the scope of these reported rent increases, we ask that you provide us with a written update within 30 days answering the following questions:

1. How many housing units occupied by wildland firefighters are owned or leased by your respective agencies? What is the average rent for each unit?
2. How are housing prices for federal employees decided, and how are rent increases determined?
3. By what percentage have these rents increased on average over the last three years?
4. Is there a cap on rent for wildland firefighters when they are forced to pay for agency-provided housing?
5. What proactive steps are being taken by your respective agencies to address the lack of affordable housing for wildland firefighters?
6. What is the current process available for agency employees who wish to report claims of substandard housing conditions? How frequently are these units inspected?
7. What steps have your respective agencies taken to address the claims of substandard housing conditions?
8. What is the feasibility of issuing housing stipends for wildland firefighters?
9. Do the agencies have statutory or regulatory authority to pause or reverse these rent increases until Congress passes a permanent pay increase for wildland firefighters? If so, please provide your specific reasons for not doing so.

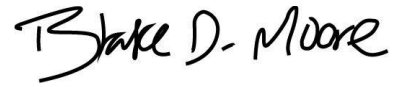
We appreciate your clarification and attention to this critical issue and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



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Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



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Blake D. Moore  
Member of Congress



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Josh Harder  
Member of Congress



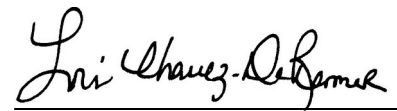
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John R. Curtis  
Member of Congress



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Katie Porter  
Member of Congress



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Lori Chavez-DeRemer  
Member of Congress