



**AGENDA ITEM: 11.4**

**AGENDA DATE: June 13, 2025**

**TO: Chairman and Members of the Board**  
**THRU: Michael A Kaigler, County Manager**  
**FROM: James Vickers, Fire Chief**

*Michael A. Kaigler*

**James Vickers**

**ISSUE:**

Request Board approval to submit a grant application to FEMA’s SAFER Grant Program in the amount of \$14,367,656 in federal funding to support the hiring of up to seventy-two (72) additional firefighters over a three (3) year period. (NOTE: There is a local cost share required over a three (3) year period in the amount of \$9,247,181.)

**BACKGROUND:**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program to enhance the ability of fire departments to attain and maintain 24-hour staffing to ensure adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. This grant provides direct financial assistance to support the hiring of additional firefighters and to bolster department staffing levels to meet the Insurance Services Offices (ISO), and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 standards.

Chatham County Fire Department (CCFD) meets the eligibility requirements and is seeking permission to apply through the SAFER Grant Program to support the hiring of seventy-two (72) additional firefighters over a three year period:

- 18 Advanced Firefighters
- 9 Apparatus Operators
- 36 Lieutenants
- 9 Captains

This increase in staffing is necessary to address operational service gaps identified in the Community Risk Assessment conducted by the ICMA Center for Public Safety Management and further detailed in the CCFD Strategic Plan 2024–2028. Addressing these gaps will help bring CCFD into alignment with NFPA 1710 standards and support compliance with the Insurance Services Office - Public Protection Classification (ISO-PPC) system.

The SAFER Grant includes a cost-sharing requirement over the three-year performance period after which the County would be responsible for the entire cost of salaries and benefits:

- Years 1 & 2: 75% federal / 25% local
- Year 3: 35% federal / 65% local

<u>Year</u>	<u>Federal Share</u>	<u>County Match</u>
Year 1	\$5,546,203.85	\$1,848,734.62

<u>Year</u>	<u>Federal Share</u>	<u>County Match</u>
Year 2	\$5,895,914.52	\$1,965,304.84
Year 3	\$2,925,537.64	\$5,433,141.33
Total	\$14,367,656.01	\$9,247,180.78

**FACTS AND FINDINGS:**

1. The SAFER Grant Program provides funding directly to fire departments to increase or maintain the number of trained, front-line firefighters in communities.
2. CCFD seeks \$14,367,656 in federal funds through the SAFER Program to support the salaries and benefits of seventy-two (72) additional full-time firefighters for a three-year period.
3. This staffing increase is necessary to address service gaps identified by the ICMA Center for Public Safety Management and CCFD Strategic Plan 2024–2028. These gaps include inadequate staffing levels to meet national deployment benchmarks for fire services.
4. Hiring seventy-two firefighters will allow CCFD to increase the number of three-person staffed apparatus and improve movement toward full NFPA 1710 compliance, which recommends four firefighters per engine company. Closing these gaps will also enhance the department’s ISO-PPC classification, benefiting community risk ratings and insurance premiums.
5. The proposed positions will enhance emergency response capacity, reduce fatigue and burnout among current personnel, improve operational safety, and reduce overall response times for fire, medical, and special operations.
6. With steady growth in Chatham County’s population and emergency call volume, the ICMA assessment and Strategic Plan confirm that current staffing is insufficient to meet growing demand. Addressing these personnel deficits is vital to sustaining high-quality, reliable service delivery.
7. The total estimated project cost is \$23,614,837, which includes \$14,367,656 in federal SAFER Grant funds and a local match of \$9,247,181 over the three-year period.

**BLUEPRINT ALIGNMENT:**

**Goal 4: Provide effective and efficient government services while ensuring that processes and procedures are planned and executed with transparency.** This proposal strengthens core government services by addressing emergency staffing shortfalls and aligns with countywide goals of efficient resource management and strategic investment in public safety.

**FUNDING:**

The total project cost is \$23,614,837, of which \$14,367,656 is requested in federal SAFER Grant funding, and \$9,247,181 will be provided as the county’s required match over the three-year period. The funding source for the County’s match has not yet been identified. This grant would help implement the strategic plan for increasing staff.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Authorize staff to submit the grant application to FEMA’s SAFER Grant Program for

\$14,367,656 in federal funding, with a local cost share of \$9,247,181 to support the hiring of up to seventy-two additional firefighters.

2. Provide staff with other directions.

**POLICY ANALYSIS:**

Submitting this grant application supports the Board of Commissioners’ commitment to public safety, addresses strategic staffing deficiencies, and secures federal funding to meet growing service demands. The project aligns with the ICMA Center for Public Safety Management recommendations and CCFD Strategic Plan 2024–2028, national standards such as NFPA 1710, and the ISO-PPC framework ensuring safer conditions for firefighters and enhanced service reliability for the public.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Board approve Alternative 1.

James Vickers	Completed	06/09/2025 2:31 PM
Holly Fields	Completed	06/09/2025 3:12 PM
Tara Jennings	Completed	06/05/2025 3:19 PM
Tara Jennings	Completed	06/05/2025 3:19 PM
Leydy Espada-Arango	Completed	06/09/2025 3:28 PM
Robin Panther	Completed	06/10/2025 1:10 PM
Vicki Center	Completed	06/10/2025 1:17 PM
Vicki Center	Skipped	06/06/2025 2:24 AM
Duplicate workflow item		
Robin Panther	Completed	06/10/2025 1:48 PM
Duplicate workflow item		
Leydy Espada-Arango	Skipped	06/06/2025 2:25 AM
Duplicate workflow item		
Linda Cramer	Completed	06/10/2025 3:56 PM
Danielle Hillery	Completed	06/10/2025 4:12 PM
Michael A. Kaigler	Completed	06/10/2025 4:13 PM
Board of Commissioners	Pending	06/13/2025 9:30 AM