

United States Senate

July 19, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretaries Vilsack and Haaland,

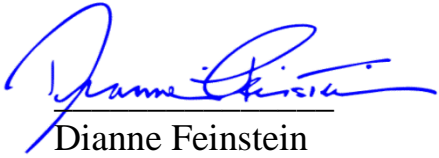
We write to express our ongoing concerns regarding the shortage of wildland firefighters at the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior. For years, these staffing shortages have been attributed to the low salary and high risk associated with these positions. Congress recently provided \$600 million to your agencies to increase firefighter salaries, and we are pleased that federal firefighters are now starting to receive these pay raises. We urge your agencies to take advantage of this pay supplement to recruit additional firefighters and reach your staffing targets before this year's California fire season begins in earnest.

As you well know, wildfires are one of the most critical challenges currently facing the West; the eight largest wildfires in California history have occurred since 2017. During that span, more than 10 million acres have burned, killing nearly 200 people and destroying more than 32,000 homes. Because 58 percent of the forestland is federally-owned, the federal government has an obligation to provide the resources necessary to combat these fires. Nevertheless, we understand that the U.S. Forest Service has a shortage of approximately 1,200 firefighters, 500 of which are in California, and the Interior Department has a shortage of roughly 450 firefighters, 150 of which are in California. Federal firefighter shortages in past fire seasons required the diversion of other resources to combat these fires, putting at risk not only federally owned forests, but also state and private lands.

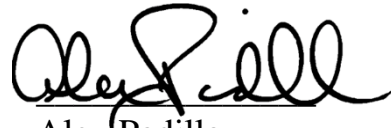
With the funds Congress provided through the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, your agencies have the responsibility to demonstrate the efficacy of higher salaries and the need for a permanent pay increase for wildland firefighters. We therefore urge you to fill the outstanding vacancies without further delay, with

additional hiring events if necessary, and request that you update us regularly on your progress.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator



Alex Padilla
U.S. Senator