

**Department of Homeland Security  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
U.S. Fire Administration  
Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy  
March 15, 2022  
Zoom Teleconference**

**Attendees:**

The following members of the Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy were in attendance for the teleconference.

John S. Butler (Chairperson)  
Fire Chief  
Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department  
12099 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22033

Dr. Michael Macey  
Director of Public Safety  
St. John's College  
1160 Camino Cruz Blanca  
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Dr. Patricia McIntosh (Vice Chair)  
Emergency Management Coordinator  
College of the Mainland  
1200 N. Amburn Road  
Texas City, TX 77591

Steven Dubay  
Deputy Chief  
Colorado Springs Fire Department  
375 Printers Parkway  
Colorado Springs, CO 80910

Thomas E. Romaine, Jr.  
Smokechaser  
Minnesota Department of Natural  
Resources - Forestry  
644 Pfaender Drive  
New Ulm, MN 56073

Kristin Crowley  
Fire Chief  
Los Angeles Fire Department  
200 N. Main Street, Suite 1770  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dr. Mark A. Rivero  
Site Coordinator  
Southern Illinois University  
1044 Beaver Crest Court  
Henderson, NV 89015

Federal Emergency Management Agency/U.S. Fire Administration/National Fire Academy (FEMA/USFA/NFA) staff in attendance:

Chief Steve Dean, Deputy Superintendent, NFA  
Mr. Ken Farmer, Branch Chief, Education, Training and Partnerships Branch, NFA  
Mr. Eriks Gabliks, Superintendent, NFA  
Ms. Deb Gartrell-Kemp, Program Support Specialist  
Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, U.S. Fire Administrator, USFA  
Chief Richard Patrick, Director, National Fire Programs Division  
Mr. Lester Rich, Branch Chief, Response Branch, NFA  
Ms. Christine Spangler, Branch Chief, Leadership and Community Risk Reduction Branch, NFA  
Ms. Michelle Spielman, Secretary  
Ms. Tiffany Warren, Branch Chief, Training, Administration, Planning and Analysis Branch, NFA  
Ms. Julia Hanson-Takyi, Analyst, Office of Partnership and Engagement, Department of Homeland Security  
Ms. Sarahjane Call, Federal Advisory Committee Act Representative

Others in attendance/public attendees:

None

**Convene Board of Visitors Meeting/Welcome**  
**Chief John S. Butler, Chairperson, Board of Visitors**  
**Dr. Patricia McIntosh, Vice Chairperson, Board of Visitors**  
**Mr. Eriks Gabliks, Superintendent, National Fire Academy**  
**Chief Steve Dean, Deputy Superintendent, National Fire Academy**  
**Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, U.S. Fire Administrator, U.S. Fire Administration**

Chief Steve Dean welcomed everyone to the meeting, and Ms. Deb Gartrell-Kemp took roll call for the meeting.

Chief Dean welcomed the Board with opening remarks:

Good afternoon, and welcome to this meeting of the USFA/NFA Board of Visitors. This meeting is being conducted under regulations outlined in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).

I want to thank you for volunteering your time, diligent work and for completing the necessary security and ethical processes to serve as Special Government Employees.

My name is Steve Dean. I am the deputy superintendent of the NFA and will be serving as Alternate Designated Federal Officer (ADFO) for this meeting. My role is to serve as liaison between the Board of Visitors and the USFA. I am also responsible for ensuring that all the provisions of the FACA are met regarding the operation of the Board of Visitors. You know Ms. Deb Gartrell-Kemp, whose work with FACA officials at FEMA and the Department of Homeland

Security have made this meeting possible and made my work immeasurably easier and more productive. Ms. Michelle Spielman and Ms. Ellen Newlin are Deb's backups, and I want to thank them officially for everything they do to make this meeting successful.

We have an agenda as published in the Federal Register. The times listed are approximate, and we may need to adjust the agenda to accommodate schedules. We must ensure that time for deliberations is adequate and that the public has ample time to make comments. No comments were sent in from the public.

Dextera/Leading Solutions support staff, Ms. Jennifer Vanover, will be taking notes and will compile minutes. Minutes will include matters discussed and conclusions reached by the Board. As ADFO, I am responsible for preparing the minutes and ensuring that they are certified by the meeting chair within 90 calendar days. All comments and notes will be available for public review forever. A report will be prepared for the FEMA administrator as required by the enabling legislation.

Chief Dean convened this meeting of the USFA/NFA Board of Visitors. Chief Dean deferred the management of the meeting to Chief John Butler, chair of the Board of Visitors.

Chief Butler called the meeting to order.

Chief Butler welcomed and thanked everyone that was present for this meeting. He congratulated a member of the Board of Visitors, Chief Kristen Crowley. She is now the new fire chief for the city of Los Angeles, California. She is new to the position but not new to the city of Los Angeles. He stated that it is a historic day and time in the history of the U.S. fire service in many ways and definitely for the city of Los Angeles. Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Chief Crowley so she could say a few words.

Chief Crowley thanked Chief Butler and everyone for the congratulations. She stated that it is a true honor. She will be sworn in on March 25 and will officially be in the seat on March 27. She is looking forward to the collaboration with everyone throughout the nation. She is looking forward to working with everyone and looking forward to the challenge. Chief Butler again offered his congratulations on behalf of the Board of Visitors.

Chief Butler then stated that he would turn the meeting over to the U.S. fire administrator, Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, for her to talk about a few things.

Dr. Moore-Merrell thanked Chief Butler and added her congratulations to Chief Crowley. She stated that she is very excited for what is ahead in Los Angeles. Dr. Moore-Merrell and Chief Crowley have spoken to each other previously and have exciting things planned already. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that there is a lot going on, and she thanked everyone for what they are doing for the NFA and the thoughtful process that is put into the work of the Board of Visitors.

Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that the Board of Visitors' last report has been submitted to the FEMA administrator and has attracted some attention. The FEMA administrator is very attentive to the USFA and has been a great partner in helping to open doors and making sure changes that need to

be made are being made. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that the FEMA administrator is very accountable, and when there are issues that need fixed, everyone should be prepared to step up and fix them. With the last report that was submitted, there were some issues that the Board of Visitors highlighted. The FEMA administrator has asked for a full briefing on those issues, so Dr. Moore-Merrell has given that work back to the superintendent, Mr. Eriks Gabliks, so he can gather the briefing information that they need. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that she will be having a meeting with the FEMA administrator and her senior adviser this week. They will see what they can do to fix some of the issues that were highlighted in the Board of Visitors report. She stated that maybe that will help with thoughts on other things when going forward with issues. She encourages everyone to continue to be thoughtful and understand that those reports are being looked at attentively. She stated that they should be thoughtful on how they frame those reports and the issues that they bring to the table.

Dr. Moore-Merrell gave a quick update on the initiatives that they have started working on. She stated that when she first met everyone, she said they were going to be mission driven and mission focused. She has brought all staff together for a couple of town hall meetings, and the senior staff has had planning sessions. They just had the second planning session to do a full forensic evaluation of the USFA. They are looking at everything starting with the budget. They are looking at the spend plans, the organization and how they are organized. They are working on a full reorganization. They are checking to see if the things they are doing are mission driven, and if not, then they are going to stop doing them. That will have a lot to do with some of the classes. Are the classes mission driven, are they supporting and strengthening our stakeholders, and are they efficient and effective in their deliveries? Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that they are going to be looking at all aspects of the USFA. They are planning for a reorganization, and they will be putting together a plan to submit it to FEMA. Other directorates within FEMA are doing the same thing. Oftentimes budget proposals are put in to ask for more or to do more, but they do not stop doing things they should stop doing in order to be efficient. They are doing that type of evaluation within the USFA as a whole right now. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that she is looking forward to being able to share that with everyone, both in regard to the NFA as well as to what they do going forward, and in regard to how they can be efficient, effective and mission driven. Dr. Moore-Merrell asked if anyone had any questions. There were no questions at this time.

Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that they are working on a plan for their first annual USFA Administrators Conference on Fire Prevention and Control. That conference is going to be held on Oct. 2 through 4, and Monday, Oct. 3 is the start of Fire Prevention Week. They will be working with their national organizations. Dr. Moore-Merrell asked if anyone had heard of the Truman Foundation and the conference that goes along with that. It was based on the 1947 report of President Truman, and the symposium that he held at that time was about the fire problem in the United States. She stated that now it is 75 years later and many of the problems that they had then they still have now. It may be different contexts and different building materials, but they are still experiencing a great number of fire fatalities. That is why they have to draw attention to the issue. So, they are going to be hosting the first ever Fire Administrators Conference. It is in their legislative directive and their authority to host such a conference. They will be putting that together, and it will be a by-invitation-only conference to all the national organizations, the stakeholder organizations, and their partners with their principal plus one. A portion of the conference will be by invitation only, and then a portion of it will be public. That will be more of

a hybrid event and a virtual opportunity. The reason they are going to keep the first part by invitation only is that they are raising this to the attention of the Biden White House. At 75 years of being known as the Truman Foundation, they are going to propose that it is time to change this to a different presidential name. They are lifting this up and are hopeful that the president will join the fire service and have a roundtable conversation. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that this is only a preview, and there will be more forthcoming on that regardless of whether or not they can get the president to join. They will be proceeding with such a conference to have this roundtable conversation with the national players to ensure that they are appropriately addressing the fire problem in this country. That will span everything from wildland urban interface (WUI) to the structural fire fatalities that are going on. Fire fatalities are well over 600 already this year. Dr. Moore-Merrell finds that to be a stunning number. Most people are probably not aware, and that is probably a low number given that they are only tracking what is reported in the media. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that she suspects that number is low, but for fire fatalities in this country it is high, and it is time to get someone's attention beyond the fire service. They cannot fix this problem alone. They are going to hold this conference to try to draw some attention and see if they can get some consistency, messaging and longevity in action. Dr. Moore-Merrell wanted to share that with the Board of Visitors because they will be hearing more and more about it as they continue their planning. Dr. Moore-Merrell turned the meeting back over to Chief Butler.

Chief Butler asked if she happened to know where that would take place. Dr. Moore-Merrell stated that it will be held on campus because it is a secured facility. Dr. Moore-Merrell thanked everyone again for their service, and she stated that she looks forward to hearing about what they are going to be presenting.

Chief Butler stated that Chief Tonya Hoover is traveling, so he will turn the meeting over to Mr. Gabliks. Mr. Gabliks said he will cover the report from the NFA a little later. He stated that Chief Hoover is in California this week for the California Fire Prevention Institute conference. She is at that conference on behalf of the USFA, and since she came to the USFA from California, she has connected with some of her friends and co-workers from over the years. Mr. Gabliks stated he will speak again when they get to the updates for the NFA.

Chief Butler asked if Chief Dean had any more information that he wanted to add. Chief Dean replied that he did not.

### **U.S. Fire Administration Data, Research, Prevention and Response**

**Chief Richard Patrick, Director, National Fire Programs Division, U.S. Fire Administration**

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Chief Richard Patrick.

Chief Patrick stated that it was a pleasure to see everyone and join in on this meeting even though it is virtual. He stated that he is looking forward to seeing everyone on campus before too long. He stated that he thanked Mr. Bill Troup in advance for filling in for him at the last meeting. Chief Patrick stated that he is not going to speak on the topics that Mr. Troup spoke on. He knows Mr.

Troup spent quite a bit of time on research efforts and some larger projects that were engaged in the National Fire Programs Division, and those are all still ongoing.

Chief Patrick stated that he would like to fill in the blanks of some other things that have occurred since then. He stated that he wanted to mention a little bit about the conference they are planning for in the fall, but Dr. Moore-Merrell covered that topic.

Chief Patrick stated that in January of this year, they launched the first podcast program which will be known as “The USFA Podcast.” Since the first podcast from Chief Hoover and Dr. Moore-Merrell discussing the USFA and a vision for the future, they have addressed a couple other topics, and it is now a monthly process. Chief Patrick stated that if the Board of Visitors members have any ideas or suggestions or even interest in participating in a podcast, to feel free to reach out to him and he will share Ms. Teresa Neal’s information. She is the host and leader of that program within the Prevention and Information Sharing branch. All information from the existing podcasts is on the USFA website. They are prerecorded, not live, and they do get vetted before release. The first episode was released on Jan. 20. That is something completely new to the USFA as they reach out from new venues to get the message out for fire and life safety, community risk reduction, etc., to the stakeholders — the stakeholders being the citizens across the U.S., not only the fire service partners.

Chief Patrick stated that they have also built upon the involvement in codes. Since Chief Hoover came on board, they have increased their posture with the International Code Council as well as other code groups including the FEMA Building Codes Working Group from a disaster resilience perspective. Essentially, within the USFA they created a USFA Building Codes Working Group for that. That is led by 2 fire engineers, a fire marshal that they have on staff and a collection of subject matter experts (SMEs) from across the USFA with a focus on advocating for life safety improvements in standards and codes. They are getting progressively more engaged in code work and activities as they relate to all national standards regarding building codes and related items. The group will work to use USFA resources to educate and champion modern code adoption in stakeholder communities as a method of prevention and risk mitigation.

Chief Patrick stated that the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) is the nation’s largest annual database of fire incident responses. They have 24,300 departments across the nation (out of roughly 30,000) that report to NFIRS on a regular basis. In 2020, they had a total of 28 million responses. They are anticipating, as the data is coming in from the states for 2021, to more than likely hit 30 million incidents being reported by roughly the same number of departments.

Chief Patrick stated that this week is NFIRS week, and it is the second annual event where they focus a lot of effort through their media streams on NFIRS, what it is and what it is not, and its capabilities. The goal is to provide educational opportunities for the states and their designates on common NFIRS questions via a train-the-trainer concept that is informal and informational and that allows the attendee to immediately apply and educate others on the material. This week the primary focus is on the state NFIRS leaders which are mostly housed within fire marshal agencies at the state level. So, the focus is mostly on the state’s role in collecting, analyzing and submitting the data. It is actually occurring right now at the same time as this Board of Visitors meeting. It is

1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Eastern Standard Time Monday through Friday of this week, and it will end on Friday afternoon with Dr. Moore-Merrell providing her vision of data and NFIRS into the future.

Chief Patrick stated that the National Fire Data Center (NFDC) has released the “Fire Data Analysis Handbook” since the last meeting. This handbook describes statistical techniques for analyzing data typically collected by fire departments. The handbook is available in PDF on the website or in hard copy. If anyone knows someone that would like a copy, they will happily send it out. Just in the past couple of days they also released the 2020 Public Data Release across the media stream of OpenFEMA. It is also available by DVD for the researchers. They get hundreds of requests for this information on a regular basis. The other areas on the NFDC side are Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) reports. They develop, in the data warehouse, a number of reports for AFG applicants that are available through the website. The AFG application process requires that fire departments provide statistical information about their responses and other metrics during a 3-year period of time. The NFIRS team developed reports in the data warehouse to rapidly obtain this information, enhancing the grant submission process. With the reports, they have good success stories with people that have used them for their own agencies. Another recent report that the NFDC released just this calendar year is the “Nonresidential Building Fires (2017-2019)” report, which came out 2 weeks ago. The Fire Department Registry report is a volunteer registry of fire departments in America. There are a little over 27,000 departments that are registered in the Fire Department Registry. They also released “How to Code an Electric or Hybrid Vehicle Fire” NFIRSGram to give information to state and local fire departments on how to code specifically electrical fires related to electric and hybrid vehicle fire situations. Chief Patrick stated that he will send this information to Ms. Gartrell-Kemp. Some links are listed below.

- “Nonresidential Building Fires (2017-2019)”: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/statistics/reports/nonresidential-building-fires-v21i9.html>.
- Fire Department Registry Report: “[National Fire Department Registry Summary](#)” (fema.gov) and <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/xls/registry-special-services-2022.xlsx>.
- Total number of registered fire departments by state and territories: 27,176, and that includes 12 departments from U.S. territories. “[National Fire Department Registry Quick Facts](#)” (fema.gov).
- Electric vehicle NFIRSGram: “[How to Code an Electric or Hybrid Vehicle Fire](#)” (fema.gov).

Chief Patrick stated that they do firefighter fatality reporting, and in January 2021 they were charged statutorily to start collecting firefighter suicide-related data, whether it is on the job or off the job. They have been collecting on the job if reported as the system is voluntary. They are in the process of developing a program for collecting all firefighter suicide data. They are working with federal partners on existing systems so that they do not duplicate the system. They issued a report to Congress at the end of last calendar year on the status of what they know and where they are headed. It is an unfunded mandate, so they are doing the best they can with the existing resources, and they are making good progress.

Chief Patrick stated that they are engaged in mental health and behavioral health activities for the most important side: the preventative side. He stated that he personally represents the USFA on

the White House Interagency Policy Committee on mental health and behavioral health for suicide prevention. This is a dynamic interactive group that is sharing work that is already done across the federal government and identifying gaps that exist, and it goes to the highest levels of government under this administration to address this topic. It is exciting and dynamic work considering they have a number of people at the USFA that actually have backgrounds in behavioral health and psychology. They are leveraging that expertise. Chief Patrick stated that in July of this year, 988 goes live nationwide. That is the suicide lifeline, so think of it like 911, but instead it is 988. With the rollout of 988 this July, the services provided by America's Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline will be expanded to offer a direct connection of compassionate and accessible care for anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts or emotional distress. There will be more information coming on that later.

Chief Patrick stated that Mr. Troup did speak a little at the last meeting about "America Burning Revisited 2021." They received it from the contractor, and it is going through its final stage of editing. They are hoping to have it delivered to the U.S. fire administrator within the next 2 weeks for the next steps on that document. The "America Burning Revisited 2021" document is a retrospective look at "America Burning" from the initial document all the way through the 2 congressional revisits and then up to 2012. Since then, there has been no review, so they are looking at what was accomplished and where the gaps remain. It is a document for the USFA to address for strategic planning going forward.

Chief Patrick stated that since the last meeting, they added an emergency medical services (EMS) SME within the National Fire Programs. They have a lot of EMS breadth of knowledge, but they are building out a dedicated program area for EMS and are looking to build that out more comprehensively. Roughly 65% to 70% of all fire department responses are EMS or EMS-related incidents. USFA National Fire Programs has developed a concentration on EMS recognizing it as an essential pillar and community lifeline in the all-hazards approach and mission by supporting the profession to the level of other emergency responders.

Chief Patrick stated that they are working directly with Dr. Moore-Merrell on a Step Up to Fire Safety Campaign through the prevention branch. Dr. Moore-Merrell will officially announce this campaign at the Congressional Fire Services Institute annual event coming in a few weeks in D.C. They are seeking support from nongovernmental fire service organizations to begin month-by-month messaging to the public using agreed upon messaging and a common theme for each topic. There will be more information coming out about that later. That goes directly with the Fire Prevention Week activities that Dr. Moore-Merrell spoke about earlier in the meeting.

Chief Patrick stated that the USFA leads a Federal Fire Working Group which is an internal U.S. government group of anybody that works on anything in the fire world. The next meeting on that is April 13. If anybody is interested in participating in that meeting, it will be virtual. He would be happy to share that information with them. The focus is going to be on fire and life safety and the campaign.

Chief Patrick stated that the USFA and the National Fire Programs remain very active in the COVID-19 response and representing EMS and fire service entities within the federal government. He stated that his division alone has spent over 13,000 collective hours since January 2020 engaged



in this. He has at least 1 employee whose whole job still concerns only COVID-19 work. Even with everything being relaxed in the country, COVID-19 is still alive and well. They are continuing to monitor the rebirth of Omicron itself as well as some of the other variants that are floating around. Related to that, they have talked about the COVID-19 Special Study that they are doing on NFIRS. That study remains in effect, and through the end of last calendar year they have had over 14.5 million responses that came in from fire departments responding to incidents reported with possible COVID-19. Of that 14.5 million, 477,000 responses indicated that COVID-19 was suspected, and for a little over 222,000 of those responses, COVID-19 was confirmed. There are a lot of other statistics on the website that link to this. Chief Patrick stated that on the most recent death count related in the first responder community, the number that he currently has is 1,270 COVID-19 fatalities. Broken down, 876 of them are law enforcement and correctional officers, 269 are firefighters, 91 are non-fire-based EMS, and 34 are 911 telecommunicators. That is just a few numbers since March of 2020. Some links are listed below.

- There is a dedicated COVID-19 resource page on the USFA website: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/coronavirus/index.html>.
- The National Emergency Training Center (NETC) Library developed and shared the COVID-19 Research Guide on the library webpage: <https://netc-library.libguides.com/covid19>. This guide is designed to help researchers, students, practitioners and the general public find materials related to the ongoing pandemic.
- [NFIRS COVID-19 Special Study dashboard](#) (fema.gov).

Chief Patrick stated that there was the Pandemic Response Analysis Meeting COVID-19 Hotwash back in October, where they heard from the first responder agencies across America on where the major hurdles were during the pandemic, and they suggested solutions to try to dynamically bridge or close some of those gaps. They have been doing that since that meeting. They have drafted a final report and the results of those meetings. That report rests with the U.S. fire administrator at this point. They are making progress in relationship to the gaps that occurred during the pandemic. Chief Patrick asked if there are any questions.

Chief Butler stated that earlier in the calendar year there were some rather significant amounts of fire deaths. He asked Chief Patrick if he had any fresh numbers for the first quarter of this year for fire deaths in general. Chief Patrick stated that as of March 11, it is 581. Those are open source and not information that comes through NFIRS. They have staff that has a process and methodology that combs media sources for those numbers. Chief Patrick stated that he has it broken down by sex, age groups, etc. Chief Butler asked if Chief Patrick could tell or reference that to what it was in the past couple of years. Chief Patrick stated that he would have to get back to Chief Butler on that. He stated that he could get that information and send it to Mr. Gabliks to share with the group. They have looked retrospectively at NFPA reports on that, and they have been really accurate at keeping track of that information. Chief Patrick asked if there were any other questions. There were no more questions at this time. Chief Patrick thanked everyone for letting him share his presentation.

## **Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvements on the National Emergency Training Center Campus**

### **Mr. Eriks Gabliks, National Fire Academy, Superintendent**

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Mr. Gabliks.

Mr. Gabliks stated that he will be giving the Management, Operations, and Support Services (MOSS) update. Chief Hoover is actually acting as the MOSS director because Mr. Fluman retired. They are screening applicants for that position. Mr. Gabliks stated that the update he has for the facilities is relatively short. The reason for that is they are in continuing resolution which means they do not have their full budget yet for the current fiscal year. So, they get continuing resolution dollars basically to sustain their operations but not to start anything new.

Mr. Gabliks stated that for MOSS, the biggest project actively happening on campus is Building N. That is where the NETC Library is and also where the USFA offices are located. When coming down the main road on campus, there is a beautiful building with a portico on it. That is where the U.S. fire administrator and the deputy fire administrator's offices are. On the back end is the NETC Library. That is the building currently in the process of having the heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems replaced. That work started just before Christmas, and it should be finished up in a couple of weeks. It will be good to have updated HVAC equipment in there that is also more energy efficient. That work is taking a lot of time, but everything is on schedule. They anticipate moving the library staff in very soon, and that will be followed by the U.S. fire administrator and the deputy fire administrator moving back into their offices. Then eventually the third and fourth floor is where Emergency Management Institute (EMI) will have their offices. EMI is actually doing some remodeling to that part, so they know that they are not going to be able to move back in right away. MOSS is anticipating receiving approximately \$2.7 million in the next fiscal year when it comes in for deferred maintenance on campus. (There has been clarification that this amount will be split between NETC and the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP).) They are waiting for that to be in the final budget, but that is the number that is being discussed. Mr. Gabliks asked if there were any questions. There were no questions at that time.

## **National Fire Academy Updates on Developments, Deliveries, Staffing and Admissions**

### **Mr. Eriks Gabliks, National Fire Academy, Superintendent**

Mr. Gabliks stated that all the branch chiefs are on this call from the NFA. They put together a PowerPoint presentation for their discussion. Mr. Gabliks started off with the safety and health on campus because that is an ongoing discussion. On the Emmitsburg campus as of today, the standard is that all staff, students and instructors coming onto campus are to be vaccinated. That is evaluated on an ongoing basis not only by the staff on campus but working within FEMA and FEMA medical because that is the posture of all the FEMA schoolhouses. That includes the NFA, EMI and the CDP. The nurse is still on campus. Mr. Gabliks stated that the campus is working at about 60% population. Classes are not running full right now, and they are not running the full slate of classes because of social distancing. They have been monitoring the numbers. When there was a rise in COVID-19 cases across the country, there was a rise on campus for positive tests

results. None of the students that tested positive required any hospitalization. Some said they felt some flu-like symptoms; those that were tired got some rest, and those that were able to go home went home. The protocols on campus are working well. They are having discussions on when to move to 100% capacity, but they want a few more weeks of good numbers on campus before they do that. Health and safety will always be top priority on campus. Once they go to 100%, they will bring more people into the class and add more classes to the schedule. They will eventually discuss bringing people back on campus that are not vaccinated.

Mr. Gabliks stated that for off-campus classes, they continue to deliver classes in partnership with their state and local partners across the country. They will make sure that the instructors know what the health and safety guidelines are for every state they go to for classes, and they will go by those guidelines. There is no requirement for vaccinations except for NETC in Emmitsburg and Anniston in Alabama.

Mr. Gabliks stated that when the pandemic happened, they suspended in-person classes, but they wanted to remain relevant and active within the career and volunteer agencies across the country, so they were able to pivot a few classes very quickly to a Zoom format. They were all 2-day classes that they were able to convert. They just recently added 5 more classes to the Zoom format.

- “Fire Service Safety Culture: Who Protects Firefighters From Firefighters” (S0349).
- “Executive Skills Series: Exercising Leadership Within Communities” (S0520).
- “Executive Skills Series: Exercising Leadership to Facilitate Adaptive Change” (S0521).
- “Executive Skills Series: Exercising Leadership Through Difficult Conversations” (S0522).
- “Executive Skills Series: Exercising Leadership Ethically” (S0523).

Mr. Gabliks stated that they are very realistic that Zoom is not the vehicle for all of the training programs, but it has served its purpose. It does allow them to reach students that are in remote populations that have never been to NFA for a class. They are hopeful that when those students take the 2-day class online, eventually they will sign up and take a 2-day class in person, whether it be in their state or at NFA. They continue to see good results and will continue to build on that. They do have to maintain a strong presence on campus because a number of the activities, exercises and classes are not ready or appropriate for the Zoom format.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they are currently running 2 versions of the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program. The legacy program is for the men and women that are finishing up the old program. That program is the one that was 4 years and 4 papers. That has now gone into 5 years and 4 papers, and in some cases, it is pushing close to 6 years because of the pandemic. They are close to capturing everyone who needed to finish up semester 3. They did add classes to campus at the beginning of this year, but they do have approximately 10 individuals that they are trying to work with and get them through the program in a virtual way so they can get through semester 3. Then they will move to semester 4. They have brought semester 4 classes back to in person. There has been very good feedback and results from that. There is a semester 4 class on campus that has started, and they will be finishing up next week. They have additional semester 4 classes scheduled throughout the year to get that program finished. They have also discussed with the branch chief that they will still have a few individuals that do not have the ability to come onto campus, either because of vaccination status or scheduling. They will offer a final class that is a catchall when

they are done with all the in-person classes, and that will be in virtual format. They will do that with Zoom and online. That is not the preferred vehicle, but they want to give everyone in the program a chance to finish. That will be the final EFO legacy class that they offer. Mr. Gabliks asked if anyone had any question about EFO legacy. There were no questions at this time.

Mr. Gabliks stated that with the new EFO Program, Ms. Christine Spangler, Mr. Lester Rich and some other staff are working diligently to get the new EFO Program moving forward. They did launch the program last year, and they did get feedback from students that they needed to do more work on it. The staff took that to heart, and they have been interacting with the students in the new EFO Program and getting their feedback. The Blackboard system is still not up and running yet. It is not the staff; it is the complexity of merging 3 different systems together. The staff is working hard to make that happen. They had to pivot with the new EFO Program and go back to emailing out projects instead of having them online in Blackboard. They do not want to stop; they want to keep the students moving forward. The feedback that they have received is appreciated. If they would pause, then everything would get backed up and delayed. Semester 1 is being retooled, and semester 2 is actually happening now. They finished the online class, and those individuals are on campus. There are 2 semester 2 classes on campus this week. They are gathering feedback from those individuals. They are working on the curriculum for semester 3. That is with the contractors now, and the staff is working with them. When semester 3 is done, they will move forward with the build on semester 4. They did hit some potholes along the way, but that has not stopped anything; that just made them look at different options. They are moving the new EFO Program forward. They have not started on the 150 students that enrolled in the new EFO Program. They paused them last year until they got EFO legacy moving forward and the new EFO students in semester 1 and 2 moving forward. They are looking at schedules now for when to bring the new cohort of EFO students on campus and into the virtual platform. In the fall, they may open up the EFO applications for the students that want to come in. Mr. Gabliks asked if there were any questions. There were no questions at this time.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the 2-year Managing Officer Program requires an associate degree to get into the program. They are continuing those that are enrolled in the program without the use of Blackboard. They are figuring out alternative ways for students to get the information and ways the students can get their papers to them. They made the decision to no longer delay the Managing Officer Program until Blackboard was done. Some students have given feedback that they did not appreciate Blackboard not running, but once they get on campus with the learning environment, that will make up for that. Being on campus will get them in a classroom together with people from across the country, learning from each other, and having the facilitated learning that is done on campus. They opened the application window for the next cohort for Managing Officer. That is through April 15, and they will begin on Oct. 1. They do need to review and update the Managing Officer Program. They are not ready to do that yet. The staff is working countless hours to get the EFO Program going and building semesters 3 and 4. They want to get that moving forward before they open up Managing Officer. They do not have the staff to do both programs at the same time. They looked at the feedback from the current class, and the feedback was good. They do need to update it because it has been running for a couple of years. Mr. Gabliks asked if there were any questions.

Chief Crowley asked what the wait list looks like for the EFO Program and about how many people get turned away or are not qualified at that time. Mr. Gabliks stated that the group of 150 that are

waiting to move forward were out of a group of more than 450 people. They only had room for 150, and they have them ready to go. That just shows how much interest there is in the EFO Program. They have been keeping it at a manageable number, but once things get up and running — and with budget availability — they may expand the number from 150 to maybe 175 if they have the capacity to do so. Mr. Gabliks asked if there were any other questions. There were no more questions at this time.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the enrollments are steady on campus and not overwhelming. They are able to manage the enrollments. They are hearing from students that there is not an abundance of interest to travel out of state. Some people just want to stay home, and some agencies do not want anyone to leave because of staffing issues. The residential programs are moving forward well. They are at a low number because they cannot accommodate all the applications due to the 60% capacity rule. The state weekends are also hit or miss. The state trainings are mostly east of the Mississippi. Those state training program students come to campus on a Friday night and stay till Sunday. Mr. Gabliks used Maryland as an example. Normally they have 6 classes for them on campus. They were on campus early this month and only able to fill 3 classes. They are just not seeing the strong numbers come on campus because of travel. They also heard it was because of the increased cost of food on campus. Also, people are just taking vacations and spending time with their families since things have opened back up. What they are doing for state weekends is that if they were only able to fill 3 classes on campus, they will have a rain check for 3 classes that they will deliver in state. That has been working well to recycle those classes into the states and deliver those locally. They are looking to add a few NFA weekends. What is limited to the state will be made national weekends. Basically, making it open to anyone that wants to come like career, volunteer or a combination. Those will be on the schedule in a couple of weeks. Off campus, they continue to work with their state partners on an ongoing basis to bring 2- and 6-day classes to each of the states. Some states still have restrictions on how many people they can bring together. The NFA is working with them on that. They do respect the local policy and procedures. They have been rescheduling a lot of classes based on COVID-19 levels in the state and the ability to bring classes together, etc.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they implemented something a few weeks ago that they call “Red-Yellow-Green.” From the enrollment numbers, some classes are very strong (e.g., incident management and command and control classes always fill up). The fire investigation programs, community risk reduction and youth firesetter classes always fill up. There are other classes that are not as popular. They implemented a system that allows them to make those decisions by looking at the calendar long term. If they have a class with 2 people enrolled and they are 3 months out, then they have the ability to get more people through outreach on social media. But when the next month comes and the class still has only 2 people, they will cancel that class. Then that would change to a red class which means it is a scrub. They will let the students and instructors know the class will not happen. If, for example, they have 10 people in a class, and the instructors are ready to go and they bring that up to 16 or 17 people, then that would make that yellow class turn into a green class. They want to be fair to the students and the instructors. They have only been doing this for a month, but it is working. They are adding classes when they see that there is a demand for that class. They are going to be adding off-campus deliveries based on their budget availability. Running fewer classes on campus with fewer students has given them a budget savings. They have reallocated those dollars to off-campus deliveries which seem to be getting stronger numbers. Recently they

have authorized up to 100 additional 2-day classes to be delivered across the country with their state partners. They are reinvesting their dollars into other avenues and making sure the NFA is strong and relevant across the country. They have had good feedback on that.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the NFA side is filling more than 10 vacancies due to staffing retirement. They do have a dedicated workforce, and some people have been here for 20, 30 or 40 years. They are reviewing each position when a vacancy occurs, and they are updating them. Dr. Patricia McIntosh and Dr. Mark Rivero have some interest in the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) position, but the NFA has left that position vacant for salary and budget savings. They are looking to see if the FESHE position can combine with another vacancy that has the same requirements. That is internal. They are looking at reevaluating positions to see where they can combine duties that need to be handled. They are still leaving 2 positions vacant within the NFA to address a salary and benefits shortfall within the NFA budget. That is a business decision, and it sadly impacts some operations, but they have to live within their means. That is not just for FEMA, that is across the board in every organization.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they are continuing their outreach. They never stopped reaching out to their partner organizations or their affinity groups. The affinity groups are Women in Fire, Black Chief Officers Committee (BCOC), National Association of Hispanic Firefighters, and National Native American Fire Chiefs Association. They are reaching out to their partners on an ongoing basis to share the work that they are doing. Since things have opened back up and conferences are starting, they are also having a more physical presence at those conferences. They will have booths at all the major national conferences coming up. They will be out there, visible and approachable, sharing the work that they do. There are a number of staff giving presentations at conferences on the work that they are doing. The social media platforms continue to be strong as far as getting information out. They just started doing their own podcasts with the USFA. Mr. Gabliks asked if there were any questions. There were no questions at this time.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the NFA relies on hundreds of contract instructors that work for them and deliver their classes. There are 2-day, 6-day and 10-day classes, virtual, Zoom, etc. They need to keep their instructors connected to the organization especially during the pandemic and also while they are evolving and changing the way they do business. They have implemented a bimonthly Zoom meeting that all the instructors are invited to participate in. There they share the work they are doing but also get the instructors' feedback on things that they are asking questions about, things that drive them crazy, etc. They will be looking at the current instructor cadre to see how active the instructors are and what their currency is to remain as an NFA instructor. If there is a person that has not taught for a while, they will get them into a class to teach. They need to know if they are carrying some instructors that, because of job or life changes, are not available to be there. They need to know that so that those instructors are not on the rosters when they are not available. That will lead to recruiting additional instructors. They have cancelled a few classes because of instructor shortages. Some of that is because of the pandemic and some is because of scheduling. They never want to cancel an NFA class because they do not have instructors available. They are updating their recruitment process, and that includes a discussion on having a Zoom session every quarter for people interested in applying to be an instructor. Then that will take away the mystery of how people get to work at the NFA. It should not be because someone knows somebody, so they called them and asked if they were interested. They want to make it front and

center on how people can work at the NFA. They also want to update the process of getting back to people within 21 or 45 days of an application being submitted. As part of the outreach for instructors, they know they need to diversify their cadre. They are working actively with not only the national groups but also the affinity groups. They need to evaluate the contracting process. The things they currently have for the bids are that the bid to deliver the class and the travel are connected together. That only works for certain people depending on where they want to work. If someone wants to teach a class in California and they are from the West Coast, they will get a better travel rate than someone traveling from the East Coast to the West. The same is true if someone wants to work in Emmitsburg and they are close by; they will have a cheaper contract travel cost than someone from the West Coast. They are looking at different ways to do contracting, and that might be splitting travel from the cost to deliver training or just a new model completely. They are working with procurement and legal staff on that. They also need to find equity within the contracting system so it is not just people coming to campus that are within a 3-state area which has a cheaper travel cost. That is going to be a work in progress, and maybe by the next meeting there will be more information.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they are honored to announce that the EFO Professional Development Symposium is going to happen on campus. That will be April 22 and 23. They are requiring all attendees to be vaccinated under the current campus guidelines, and if that changes, there will be an announcement sent out. The FESHE conference is scheduled for June 11 and 12. That is on campus, and that information is still being refined by the committee.

Mr. Gabliks stated that Dr. Rivero and Chief Kevin Quinn have met with staff. They are finishing up the curriculum changes on the NFIRS class, and they anticipate those being ready to go in April. They are working with Chief Patrick's staff to make sure that that class is meeting the expectations on all the updates that have been made. The NFA is doing the EFO Program updates. They are migrating a lot of the EMS classes that they want to offer on campus and getting them ready for Blackboard. That is something that Mr. Mike Stern is very active in, and once they get Blackboard up and running, they will do a lot more EMS classes not only on campus but also hybrid. Then people will get assignments before and after their campus experience. They have to update the WUI curriculum. They have just put forth to hire a WUI training specialist. That was authorized in the previous budget, and they are waiting for that to arrive, but they are moving forward to start the recruitment. Once they have that position on campus, they will move forward with updating the WUI classes and also building additional classes because of the importance of that issue.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they will be doing curriculum reviews and needs assessments with EMS front to back as a whole and also the community risk reduction area.

Mr. Gabliks stated that he will finish up his presentation with the USFA strategic plan, and everyone has seen that plan. There are 3 simple elements. The NFA wanted to make sure they have an operational footprint that supports this strategic plan for the USFA because of the number of changes with staff and the number of changes within the organization (i.e., having a new U.S. fire administrator coming on board). Mr. Gabliks stated that he wanted to give the 5 highlights or goals that they have identified after a 2-day meeting: to ensure that there are current and relevant educational professional development opportunities; that the organization is student-centric and has a data-informed culture; that they are as diverse and inclusive as their culture from the NFA;

that they expand health and wellness emphasis throughout the programs; and community, sustainability and resilience. Those are very high-level goals that they are working on. Mr. Gabliks stated that he will send that information out before the next meeting or share that at the next meeting. It was a good 2-day meeting with staff about why they are here. The reason they are here is to service the nation's fire service, both career and volunteer, and most importantly the men and women who attend the classes, whether it is on campus or across the country. Mr. Gabliks asked if there were any questions. There were no more questions at that time.

Chief Butler thanked Mr. Gabliks for the informative presentation.

## **Board of Visitors Subcommittee Activity Reports**

### **Professional Development Initiative Update Dr. Patricia McIntosh, Chair**

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Dr. McIntosh.

Dr. McIntosh stated that there has been no activity this session, so they have nothing to report.

### **National Fire Incident Reporting System Dr. Mark A. Rivero, Cochair**

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Dr. Rivero.

Dr. Rivero stated that they met with some people through Mr. Gabliks, and that went well. They are waiting on a program to be developed and then they will start moving forward with some of their activities.

Chief Butler asked if there were any questions for Dr. McIntosh or Dr. Rivero. There were no questions at that time.

## **Final Comments/Adjournment**

Chief Butler asked if there were any closing comments, thoughts or questions on any previous presentations. Chief Butler shared that he was in Orlando since he had some time off before the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) Conference. He stated that there will be some members of the Board of Visitors and staff that will be there. Mr. Gabliks stated that in the last meeting, the staff connected the CPSE white paper with the EFO Program. They also use it as their strategic planning document. Ms. Spangler and Mr. Rich did bring Ms. Preet Bassi to campus to meet with the EFO and Managing Officer students, and they are going to continue that. They are excited about that partnership and want that to grow in the future. Chief Butler thanked Mr. Gabliks for sharing that information.



Chief Butler stated that he did spend a few minutes with the BCOC virtually and they did ask for a snapshot of what was going on with the Board of Visitors and the NFA. He was able to provide them with some information. Chief Butler asked if there were any more comments on old business or new business. There were no comments.

Chief Butler made a motion to adjourn the meeting at this time. Ms. Gartrell-Kemp stated that the next meeting is scheduled for Aug. 15 either on campus or via Zoom. Aug. 16 they will start to write the report, but it will have to be finished after all the numbers are gathered at the end of the fiscal year.

Meeting adjourned at about 2:15 p.m.