

Rural Fire Protection Funding
Actions taken by the 88th and 89th Legislatures

1. **Funding Background:** Over the last two decades, Texas has utilized nearly 1,300 fully volunteer fire departments (VFDs) as the first line of defense against wildfires and other disasters, with their response areas covering about 89 percent of the state. These departments depend on local budgets and a state assistance program largely funded by a special insurance assessment. Over this time, state support generally kept pace with demand with the Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program and Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS) providing over 15,000 fire truck and equipment grants and training tuition for over 100,000 firefighters.

In recent years, however, more severe wildfire seasons and other extreme weather events have increased response demands. At the same time, equipment costs have risen and supply chain delays during and after COVID have made it harder to procure equipment and trucks. Insurance Code, Chapter 2007, limits the annual insurance assessment deposited into GR-Dedicated Account 5064 to the lesser of the total amount appropriated from the volunteer fire department assistance fund account for the assistance program or \$30.0 million. As demand and costs increased, revenue from this capped assessment no longer covered eligible applications. In response, the 88th and 89th Legislatures appropriated additional funds to help address shortfalls within the program.

The table below summarizes biennial appropriations for the Rural VFD Assistance Program and TIFMAS. For the 2024–25 biennium, totals include supplemental appropriations from Senate Bill 30, 88th Legislature, and for the 2026–27 biennium, totals include supplemental appropriations from House Bill 500, 89th Legislature (further outlined in items #2 and #3 below).

Biennial Appropriations for Rural VFD Assistance Program and TIFMAS		
Fiscal Years	VFD Assistance Program (in millions)	TIFMAS Grants (in millions)
2016-17	\$60.0	\$2.0
2018-19	\$46.1	\$2.0
2020-21	\$46.1	\$2.0
2022-23	\$45.7	\$2.0
2024-25	\$55.8*	\$5.0*
2026-27	\$292.7**	\$5.0
Note: *Amounts include supplemental appropriations from Senate Bill 30, Section 4.28. **Amounts include supplemental appropriations from House Bill 500, Sections 3.07 and 3.09.		

2. **2024-25 Biennium.** The 88th Legislature, 2023, appropriated \$45.7 million for the Rural VFD Assistance Program in the 2024-25 General Appropriations Act (GAA), as well as an additional \$13.0 million in Senate Bill 30 supplemental appropriations as part of the Keeping Texas Prepared (KTP) program – including \$10.0 million from GR-D Account 5064 for VFD grants and \$3.0 million from GR-D Account 36 for TIFMAS.

2024-25 Biennium Funding Decisions

Appropriation	Amount (in millions)	Purpose
2024-25 GAA, VFD Assistance Program	\$45.7	To assist volunteer fire departments and provide for equipment and training needs
2024-25 GAA, TIFMAS Grants	\$2.0	TIFMAS grants
SB 30, VFD Assistance Program	\$10.0	Additional VFD grants
SB 30, TIFMAS Grants	\$3.0	Additional TIFMAS grants
Total	\$60.8	
Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.		

3. **2026-27 Biennium.** The 89th Legislature, 2025, appropriated \$56.4 million for the Rural VFD Assistance Program and \$5.0 million for TIFMAS grants in the 2026-27 GAA, as well as an additional \$236.3 million in House Bill 500 supplemental appropriations to address the backlog of unfunded VFD assistance grant requests and for the administration and operation of the rural volunteer fire department assistance program.

2026-2027 Biennium Funding Decisions

Appropriation	Amount (in millions)	Purpose
2026-27 GAA, VFD Assistance Program	\$56.4 million	To assist volunteer fire departments and provide for equipment and training needs.
2026-27 GAA, TIFMAS Grants	\$5.0 million	TIFMAS grants
HB 500, VFD Assistance Program	\$192.3 million	Additional VFD grants to clear backlog of unfunded requests
HB 500, VFD Assistance Program	\$44.0 million	Additional funding for administration and operation of the assistance program to prevent backlog from reforming.
Total	\$297.7 million	

4. **Unexpended Balance Authority for Supply Chain Delays.** To further address supply chain delays experiences by the VFD, both the 88th and 89th Legislatures provided carryforward authority for the Texas Forest Service, allowing obligated but unspent grant balances to carry forward into the following fiscal year to address delays in the delivery of fire trucks and equipment.