

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

May 16, 2025

The Honorable Brandon Ler
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

The Honorable Matt Regier
President of the Senate
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Speaker Ler and President Regier:

House Bill 901 establishes a new program to issue grants to fire departments to purchase safety equipment at Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) in the Department of Military Affairs and provides a \$50,000 statutory appropriation each year for this new program.

Given that House Bill 901 allows for "gifts, grants, donations, or any other charitable contributions" to be distributed to a fire department, it is a program better suited for and better managed by a charitable nonprofit organization, a non-governmental organization, or the private sector – not the government.

Even if you reject the notion that the government should not be involved in collecting and distributing charitable gifts, DES is not the appropriate government agency to manage this new government program. Given that DES has experienced a 240% increase in workload from recent disasters, it is critical that the division focus on its core mission of disaster management. Standing up a new government program to manage charitable gifts will detract DES from focusing on disaster management. Additionally, DES does not have qualified internal public health staff to advise on the effectiveness of safety equipment and materials allowable under this program.

Finally, it is difficult to determine the amount of staff and other resources necessary to launch and manage a new government program that is dependent on gifts, grants, and donations. House Bill 901 allows DES to retain up to 1% of a grant to cover administrative costs, which is insufficient to establish and administer this new government program at DES.

Therefore, in accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto House Bill 901: "AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FIRE DEPARTMENT HEALTH AND SAFETY GRANT PROGRAM; PROVIDING FOR CHARITABLE DONATIONS TO FUND GRANTS; ESTABLISHING GRANT ELIGIBILITY, PURPOSES, AND LIMITS; REQUIRING AN APPLICATION FEE; PROVIDING A STATUTORY APPROPRIATION; PROVIDING RULEMAKING AUTHORITY; AMENDING SECTION 17-7-502, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State