

Father's Day is a wonderful time for many fathers and families all across the nation to celebrate father's and the role they play in shaping the lives of their children.

As the proud father of three daughters, I am well aware of the challenges I faced as I worked to help ensure my children were raised in a positive environment during their formative years. And, now a grand father, I am very much in tune with some of the very different challenges my own children now face as parents.

We ought not to forget this important day, and we should recognize the important value father's play in shaping the lives of their children and our communities.

As we recognize father's on Sunday, I want to particularly remember our firefighters, many of whom are fathers.

There is an ongoing crisis in this country involving firefighter safety. Firefighters are being killed at an alarming rate, in fact, nationwide, there have been 50 line-of-duty deaths as of May of this year. That total is 10 more than the year before.

Last week, I joined some of my colleagues from the Congressional Fire Services Caucus to introduce legislation calling for all fire departments in the nation to conduct a Firefighter Safety Stand Down beginning Tuesday, June 21, 2005.

A stand down is a method the military uses to focus all ranks on one critical issue. Using this model, Congress will join the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and its partners in urging all fire departments throughout the country – career, volunteer, and combination – to suspend all non-emergency activity and focus entirely on firefighter safety.

During the Stand Down, all fire departments will talk about the causes of line-of-duty deaths, check all apparatus and equipment, discuss health and safety regulations, review fire ground safety issues, and take stock of training exercises and fitness goals. The IAFC has also requested that all volunteer departments conduct a special safety meeting at the end of June.

It is crucial that elected officials, community leaders and our citizens team up with firefighters on this very important issue and you can find more information about ways you can participate at <http://www.iafc.org/standdown/index.asp>.

The necessity for this Stand Down is clear. Fire departments have installed seat belts, warning buzzers, power steering, automatic transmissions, engine brakes and ABS, yet fatalities involving fire apparatus is the fastest growing category for line of duty deaths. Fifty percent of the fatalities are still occurring from heart attacks. The number of firefighters killed in structure fires continues at a steady pace of 10 to 20 per year. Firefighters are dying during their most controlled environment – training. And despite GPS, state-of-the-art weather prediction, and better equipment, wildland firefighters die in multiple numbers every year. Although we have worked to improve equipment, employed new technology, adopted new methods, gone from being under-protected to being arguably over-protected; yet the trend doesn't abate.

This is why I also think it is critical that we fulfill our obligation to ensure that our nation's firefighters have at their disposal every resource possible to not only guarantee their own safety, but also to allow them to better serve each of our communities.

I worked to help establish and work each year to help add funding to the Fire Grant Program which was established by Congress in 2000 to meet the basic equipment, training and firefighter safety requirements of America's fire service, and to bring all fire departments to a baseline of readiness to respond to all hazards. The Fire Grant program has been a tremendous success, providing more than \$3 billion nationally, and more than \$24 million in Maryland, for infrared cameras, hazmat detection devices, modern breathing apparatuses, improved training and physical fitness programs, new turnout gear, fire trucks, and interoperable communications equipment, to name but a few items.

Further, I helped establish the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Firefighter Grant Program, authorized two years ago and funded for the first time last year as a result of the adoption of an amendment I introduced. This program is a vital complement to the Fire Grant program because insufficient staffing, defined by the National Fire Protection Association as fewer than four firefighters per fire truck, is a very real problem for far too many of the nation's career and volunteer fire departments. Despite this serious need, this program was slated for elimination in the President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2006.

## **In Honor of Maryland Fathers**

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We have an obligation to provide our firefighters with the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible and the additional funding I secured this year for both of these programs will help move closer to achieving that goal

This year could be the worst year of firefighter deaths in 28 years. Or we could, by standing down, focusing on safety and remaining vigilant, buck those trends. As we recognize our fathers, I encourage all Marylanders to also recognize our firefighters and to join them in standing down for safety.