

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer urged the House Science Committee in testimony today to help the fire service and EMS communities by supporting HR 4107, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Reauthorization Act. As a co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, Hoyer helped draft this legislation which extends the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program through fiscal year 2007.

"As a co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, I have worked with my fellow co-chairs and with the fire service during the past several months to craft this important legislation. I am extremely proud of the bill we have introduced, which not only reauthorizes, but also makes significant improvements to the enormously successful Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. Increasing the size of the grant awards and reducing the local matching requirements will have a significant impact on career and volunteer departments across the country," said Representative Hoyer at the hearing.

The legislation, introduced by Congressman Hoyer and members of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, reauthorizes the Fire Grant program at \$900 million annually, mandates that the program is administered by the US Fire Administration, increases the size of the grant awards, reduces the matching requirement for larger departments, adds firefighter safety research and development to the firefighter prevention section which would benefit organizations such as the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute, and expands eligibility to include volunteer EMS squads which would benefit the many EMS squads in Maryland who are struggling to secure the resources they need to do their job.

Last month, Congressman Hoyer met with Firefighters, EMS Personnel and leaders in the Maryland Fire Community to discuss the reauthorization bill. At the event, Bertie Spalding, Chief of the Ironsides Volunteer Rescue Squad, expressed how difficult it is for their squad to purchase the equipment they need.

In addition to the Ironsides Volunteer Rescue Squad, rescue squads in the 5th Congressional District that would benefit from the expanded eligibility include the Charles County Rescue Squad in LaPlata, the Seventh District Rescue Squad, the Mechanicsville Rescue Squad, the Second District Rescue Squad and the Laurel Rescue Squad, which are just a few rescue squads in Maryland not affiliated with a local fire department.

"There are as many as 3,000 communities across the country, primarily small towns, many in

rural areas, that maintain EMS and rescue squads that are separate and distinct from the local fire department. Let me be clear -- these EMS departments do not represent a redundant capability in these communities. The fact is that they perform vital rescue and life saving missions that are not carried out by the local fire departments.

"But they are currently ineligible for much-needed assistance for no other reason than the manner in which the community has organized its firefighting and emergency response departments," added Hoyer. "I am pleased that HR 4107 expands eligibility to include these separate EMS squads, thereby resolving one of the few shortcomings in the fire grant program."

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program has provided vital resources to fire departments which often have difficulty purchasing proper equipment. A ladder truck for a local fire department can run upwards of \$750,000 and outfitting one firefighter with turnout gear and breathing apparatus can approach \$4,500. In addition, departments must fund training programs for paid and/or volunteer firefighters.

Since its establishment in 2001, the grant funding has been used for turnout gear; breathing apparatus; communications equipment; wellness and fitness programs; computer and technology improvements for record keeping and training purposes; training in fire-fighting, emergency response and arson prevention; improving the enforcement of fire codes; and modifying fire stations and fire training facilities to protect the health and safety of the firefighter personnel.

"We ask far too many of our first responders to risk their lives in our defense every day with insufficient training and inadequate equipment, and we have an obligation to provide them with the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible," added Hoyer.

Since 2001, Maryland has received nearly \$16 million in grant funding from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. Fire departments that have received grants in Maryland's Fifth District include La Plata, Hughesville, Mechanicsville, Solomons, Laurel, Prince George's County, Seventh District, Leonardtown, College Park, Cobb Island, Second District and Brandywine.

A list of all current recipients to date is posted on the USFA web site at www.usfa.fema.gov/grants. Future grant recipients will be listed as awards are made.