

WASHINGTON, DC – A group of 120 U.S. Representatives, led by Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD), sent a letter today to the Chairman and Ranking member of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee urging them to include funding in the FY 2006 Homeland Security Appropriations bill for fire fighter staffing.

The President's budget for FY06 eliminates funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Grant Program. Last year, Congressman Hoyer was successful in securing \$65 million for the SAFER Program which will help career and volunteer fire departments hire new firefighters, recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters, and provide relief to the thousands of local fire stations across the country and in the state of Maryland that are currently operating short of staff.

"In addition to inadequate training and outdated equipment, which we already address through the Fire Grant Program, insufficient staffing is a very real problem for far too many of our nation's, our state's, and our community's career and volunteer fire departments," said Congressman Hoyer. "I strongly believe we have an obligation to provide our firefighters with the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible and I urge the Committee to adequately fund the SAFER Grant Program."

Following is the text of the letter:

April 8, 2005

The Honorable Harold Rogers

Chairman

House Appropriations Committee

Subcommittee on Homeland Security

B307 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Martin Sabo

Ranking Member

House Appropriations Committee

Subcommittee on Homeland Security

1016 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Sabo:

As you begin work on the fiscal year 2006 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we strongly urge you to include funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Program. As you know, the SAFER program was authorized in the FY2004 National Defense Authorization Act, and initial funding of \$65 million was provided by Congress in fiscal year 2005.

Although the President's fiscal year 2006 budget does not provide funding for SAFER, we believe it is critical that Congress not miss the opportunity to build upon the \$65 million appropriated last year. The SAFER program provides much-needed funding for career and volunteer fire departments across America to hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters, thereby provide relief to the thousands of fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff.

We believe that when adequately funded SAFER will bring our nation's fire departments to staffing levels that will improve the safety of our firefighters, and the communities they serve, as they respond to the scene of a fire, auto accident, or other natural or manmade disaster.

Two-thirds of all career and volunteer fire departments in our Nation, located in both large cities and small towns, do not have sufficient personnel to adequately protect the public. The landmark NFPA study "A Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service," reveals it is common for fire departments to operate with staffing levels that do not meet the minimum safe staffing levels required by OSHA and the National Fire Protection Association. In addition, many local

governments are currently facing budget shortfalls and are unable to hire additional fire fighters even though public safety is clearly at risk.

Under the SAFER program, fire departments throughout the country will be able to apply for federal grants to hire and pay new fire fighters for five years. Under the program, the federal grant decreases annually on a sliding scale in order to promote complete local self-sufficiency after four years. In addition, grants will be awarded to state and local organizations to recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters.

The SAFER program complements the very successful Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, through which the federal government provides funds for training and equipment to fire stations throughout the country. Ensuring that career and volunteer departments have adequate numbers of fire fighters will allow departments to fully utilize the training and equipment money provided through the Fire Grant program.

We ask far too many of our career and volunteer firefighters to risk their lives in our defense every day, too often with insufficient staffing, inadequate training and obsolete equipment, and we have an obligation to provide them the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible.

We urge you to help Congress meet that obligation by funding the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Program in the fiscal year 2006 Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

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