

Hoyer Succeeds in Increasing Funds for Fire Grant Programs

May 16, 2005

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Co-Chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, today successfully added an amendment to the 2006 Homeland Security Appropriations bill to provide an additional \$50 million in funding to firefighter grant programs – \$25 million for the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program and \$25 million for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Firefighter Grant Program. Congressman Hoyer is a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee.

“This amendment provides much needed increases to both the Fire Grant and SAFER programs, and moves us closer to fulfilling 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,” said Congressman Hoyer.

“The \$25 million we add to each of these accounts brings the funding in the bill to \$650 million -- \$575 million for Fire grants and \$75 million for SAFER. This is \$150 million above the level requested by the President, and is a reflection of Congress’s commitment to ensuring that our fire departments are properly staffed, trained and equipped.

“But these amounts are still well below the authorized levels, and far from meeting the needs of the fire service, and we will continue working to increase the funding levels for each of these programs, both this year and in the future,” Hoyer added.

“Today’s \$50 million amendment to increase the FIRE and SAFER grants programs would not have been successful without the leadership of Congressman Steny Hoyer,” said Harold Schaitberger, President of the International Association of Fire Fighters. “Steny’s longstanding commitment to our fire fighters and his relentless hard work on both sides of the aisle means more departments will get the tools and staff they need to protect the public.”

The Fire Grant Program 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.

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“The simple fact is that the equipment and training provided by these grants have saved lives of firefighters and average citizens in communities across America, and I am proud to have played a role in establishing and funding this program,” Hoyer added.

The SAFER program, authorized two years ago and funded for the first time last year as a result of the adoption of a Hoyer amendment, 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.

Responding with fewer than four firefighters per apparatus prevents the first responder unit from complying with OSHA’s “2-in/2-out” standard for safe fireground operation, and adds unnecessary risk to the already dangerous job of fire suppression. NFPA estimates that an additional 75,000 firefighters are required across the country.

“We have an obligation to provide our firefighters with the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible and this additional funding will help move closer to achieving that goal,” said Hoyer. “With the adoption of this amendment, and our continued support of the Fire Grant and SAFER programs, we fulfill this obligation and we recognize the sacrifices our firefighters make on our behalf every day, the inherent danger of their job, and that we want to make sure they can do that job as safely and effectively as possible,” Hoyer concluded.

Since 2001, Maryland has received more than \$24 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 Fire/Emergency Medical Services Department and Arson Investigation Unit, Seventh District, Leonardtown, College Park, Cobb Island, Second District, Brandywine, Greenbelt, Benedict, Waldorf, Newburg, Prince Frederick, Potomac Heights, Bryans Road, Berwyn Heights, and Ridge.

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