

WASHINGTON – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) announced today that the Maryland Fire and Rescue Unit (MFRI) at the University of Maryland, College Park has been awarded a federal Fire Grant in the amount of \$750,000. As co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, Congressman Hoyer was very active in helping establish and fund the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, which helps local fire departments in Maryland and across the country buy equipment and provide adequate training.

“I am a strong supporter of the work done at MFRI which offers integration, teamwork, and training to fire personnel and provides a safer and more effective means for rescue workers to be successful domestic defenders,” said Congressman Hoyer. “The award of this grant is a perfect example of how federal Fire Grant funds are working to improve the safety of firefighters in our state, but also throughout the country. This grant will provide MFRI with critical research and development funds to continue their innovative research that is helping to ensure that firefighters are able to safely perform their job.”

The Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute was awarded a federal Fire Grant in the amount of \$750,000 under the program of Fire Prevention. The grant, in coordination with University of Maryland resources, will be used to support the Institute’s research and development of new technologies to locate and monitor firefighters at the scene of an emergency to help ensure safer operations on the ground. MFRI is working to develop a system that will allow fire commanders to monitor the vital signs of firefighters at the scene of an incident and obtain biofeedback including blood pressure and respiration rate. The system will provide critical information about the physical condition of firefighters, and will provide detailed information about whether they are in danger.

“This grant will allow the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute to continue our work on technology that will help first responders locate firefighters at the scene of an incident by allowing us to monitor and gain instant biofeedback on a firefighters’ vital signs,” said Steve Edwards, Director of the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute. “We appreciate Congressman Hoyer’s support of the Fire Grant program as this funding will allow MFRI, in cooperation with the University of Maryland, to develop innovative technology that will improve firefighters’ health and safety.”

Congressman Hoyer helped start the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program because fire departments 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.

The program funding can be used for the following: 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.

President Bush's budget blueprint for fiscal year 2002 eliminated funding for the Firefighter program, contending that the fire grant program "does not represent an appropriate responsibility of the federal government." Congressman Hoyer and other members of Congress have historically fought to restore funding to the program, and secured \$650 million in fiscal year 2005, \$150 million more than the President's request for 2005. However, the President's budget for fiscal year 2006 proposed another \$150 million decrease in funds for the program and Congressman Hoyer will fight to restore these funds.

The President's budget also 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 in funding for the SAFER Program in the Homeland Security funding bill. Funding for this historic new federal grant program 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 that are currently operating short of staff.

Last month, a group of 120 U.S. Representatives, led by Congressman Hoyer, sent a letter 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.

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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