

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD), co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, released the following statement today after legislation he introduced last week, H. CON. RES. 180, to make firefighter safety a national priority, was passed by the House of Representatives today.

“For a number of years, the Congressional Fire Services Caucus has worked with the nation’s fire service organizations to identify and address some of the major challenges facing career and volunteer fire departments across the country.

“Among the results of these efforts has been the establishment and funding of such critical federal programs as the Fire Grants and SAFER. These programs have resulted in billions of dollars being appropriated to help meet the equipment, training and staffing needs of fire departments in large cities, small towns and rural communities across the country.

“And there is no doubt the dollars provided by these programs have helped save the lives of firefighters and the citizens they protect.

“But there is also no escaping the reality that despite the amount of money spent, and the impact of these programs on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of fire departments, we still lose more than 100 firefighters every year to line of duty deaths, so many of which are preventable.

“The NFFF and USFA recognized this, and convened the Firefighter Life Safety Summit last year, with a goal of reducing firefighter fatalities by 25 percent within five years and 50 percent within ten years.

“These are ambitious goals that will only be attained if every member of the nation’s fire service, from the presidents of national organizations to individual firefighters, is committed to implementing the 16 initiatives recommended at the summit, and supported by this resolution.

“These recommendations range from developing medical and physical fitness standards for all firefighters to empowering all firefighters to stop unsafe practices.

“To highlight the need to adopt these common sense changes, the International Association of Fire Chiefs is leading a national stand down, a method the military uses to focus all ranks on one critical issue, this week, whereby all fire departments are urged to suspend all non-emergency activity and focus on firefighter safety.

“This resolution supports this effort, and encourages every fire department to participate in this national stand down in order to raise awareness among our firefighters about the need to take responsibility for their health and safety.

“The job of fighting fires is one of the most dangerous and physically demanding activities one can undertake.

“The real tragedy is that we have allowed unsafe practices and unhealthy habits to make the job even more hazardous than it already is.

“Congress has, and will, continue to accept our responsibility to provide funding for the equipment, training and staffing needs of our departments, but we must insist that our firefighters accept responsibility for making themselves safer on the job.”

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