

WASHINGTON DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD), co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, announced that the House of Representatives today passed a bipartisan amendment to the Fiscal Year 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations Act which increased funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) and the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Programs.

"This amendment provides much-needed increases to both the Fire Grant and SAFER programs, and it moves us closer to fulfilling our obligation to ensure that our nation's firefighters have the resources necessary to guarantee their own safety – and the safety of our communities," Hoyer said.

The amendment increased the funding for these programs to \$651 million -- \$541 million for Fire Grants and \$110 million for SAFER. That is \$357.6 million above the level requested by the President and \$111 million over the original bill.

"This increase is a reflection of Congress's commitment to ensuring that our fire departments are properly staffed, trained and equipped," Hoyer added.

President Bush's budget proposed eliminating funding for the SAFER Grant Program, which helps departments hire new firefighters, recruit and retain volunteer firefighters, and provide relief to the thousands of local fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff. Furthermore, it proposed to fund the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program at only one third the level appropriated in Fiscal Year 2004 and 2005.

In April, Hoyer and 135 of his colleagues wrote a letter to President Bush expressing their deep disappointment that the Administration continues to slash funding for local fire departments. "We ask far too many of our 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," the letter read.

While Hoyer was pleased with the passage of his amendment, he made it clear that more needs to be done. "These amounts are still well below the authorized levels, and far from meeting the needs of the fire service," he said. "We must continue to work to increase the funding levels for

each of these programs – this year and in the future.”

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