

WASHINGTON DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD), co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, called on the House Appropriations Committee to increase funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) and the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Programs.

In a letter signed by 135 of his colleagues, Hoyer expressed his deep disappointment that the Bush Administration has continued 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.

President Bush's budget proposes 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, the President's budget proposes to fund the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program at only one third the level appropriated in FY 2004 and 2005.

"In every single budget he has submitted to Congress, the President has either drastically reduced, or eliminated altogether, funding for the Fire Grant Program," Hoyer said. "This year, once again, the President has proposed slashing the funds available to help fire departments purchase equipment and provide adequate training for their members from \$545 million to just \$293 million."

While noting that nearly \$3 billion in applications were submitted for the current program year, Hoyer called the continued reduction of funds to train and equip the nation's firefighters "simply bad policy."

If necessary, Hoyer said he will offer an amendment on the House floor to increase funding for these programs. In each of the past two years, he has worked with Reps. Curt Weldon (R-PA) and Martin Sabo (D-MN) to introduce and secure passage of bipartisan amendments to increase funding for these vital programs.

"I am confident we will again demonstrate Congressional support for these programs and our

firefighters by increasing the funding requested by the President,” Hoyer said.

“Firefighters risk their lives every day when protecting us, our homes, and our families,” Hoyer added. “The very least we can do is provide them every resource available to ensure they go home safely to their families at the end of each day.”

Since 2001, Maryland has received more than \$31 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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