

COLLEGE PARK, MD - At a workshop held last evening for Maryland fire departments and first responders applying for federal grant funding, Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) pledged to work with his colleagues in Congress to restore funding President Bush cut from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program in his FY 2009 budget proposal. Since 2001, AFG has provided more than \$47.9 million in assistance to Maryland fire departments and first responder units for the purchase of personnel protective gear and response equipment and vehicles, as well as to fund training and fire prevention programs.

“Our volunteer and career firefighters provide an unbelievable service and sacrifice a great deal to protect our communities,” **said Congressman Hoyer.** “It is our duty to provide them with the equipment and training they need to keep their departments running safely and efficiently. The Assistance to Fire Grant Program is a critical resource to help fire departments and local emergency responders meet their equipment and training needs. I pledge to once again work to restore the President's proposed cuts to this vital program.”

Grant funds made available through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program are awarded to fire departments and EMS organizations across the nation to enhance their response capabilities and to more effectively protect the health and safety of the public and emergency response personnel. The [Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute \(MFRI\)](#) sponsors an annual workshop to provide guidance to Maryland's first-responder organizations applying for AFG funding. Rep. Hoyer is a federal sponsor of the workshop.

As co-chair of the Congressional Fire Caucus, Rep. Hoyer took a lead role in helping establish the AFG Program and has been an annual leader in fighting against attempts to cut funding for the program in the federal budget. After the Bush Administration proposed a 55 percent cut to the AFG program for FY 2008, Congress restored funding to \$560 million. Congress also restored funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Program, which helps fire departments that are currently operating short of staff to train, hire and retain career and volunteer firefighters. Once again this year, President Bush has proposed deep cuts to AFG and the elimination of SAFER.

“It is critical that our firefighters and first responders are provided all available resources to ensure their safety and enhance their ability to protect our communities from harm. I will continue to fully support these programs in order to meet the needs of our nation's emergency personnel on whom we so heavily rely,” **concluded Hoyer.**

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