Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 9, 2004

Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-218
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable David R. Obey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
B-307 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Martin Sabo
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Young and Rogers and Ranking Members Obey and Sabo,

We are writing to you to urge the inclusion of funding in the FY 2005 Homeland Security Appropriations bill for fire fighter staffing. Last year, in show of bipartisan support for our Nation's fire fighters, Congress enacted a new authorization as part of the Fiscal Year 2004 Defense Authorization bill. This measure, originally known as the SAFER Act, provides funds to hire up to 75,000 new fire fighters over seven years, provides funds to recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters, and promises to bring relief to the thousands of fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff.

Two-thirds of all professional and volunteer fire departments in our Nation, located in both large cities and small towns, do not have sufficient personnel to adequately protect the public. The landmark FEMA study *"A Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service,"* reveals it is common for fire departments to operate with staffing levels that do not meet the minimum safe staffing levels required by OSHA and the National Fire Protection Association. In addition, many local governments are currently facing budget shortfalls and are unable to hire additional fire fighters even though public safety is clearly at risk.

Although Congress has increased spending on first responder needs in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, no federal funding has been allocated to address the critical staffing shortage in the fire service. Under the SAFER Act, fire departments throughout the country will be able to apply for grants to fill the fire fighter shortage. The grant program, once funded, will enable fire departments to receive federal grants to hire and pay new fire fighters for five years. Under the program, the federal grant decreases annually on a sliding scale in order to promote complete local self-sufficiency after four years. In addition, grants will be awarded to state and local organizations to recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters.

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The federal government already provides funds for training and equipment to fire stations throughout the country. However, without adequate fire fighters, training and equipment money will be ineffectual. We saw on September 11th when the country is under attack, or during a natural disaster, fire fighters are the first to respond. Congress spoke when it authorized SAFER. We urge you to fulfill the promise we made last year to the Nation's fire fighters by providing the necessary funding.

Sincerely,

John E Sweeney

Sherrod Brown

Roy Blunt

Curt Weldon

Robert Menendez

Barney Frank

Michael R. McNulty

Bill Pascrell Jr.

Robert E Andrews

Eliot L. Engel

James T Moran

Jim Walsh

Gene Green

John Sullivan

Jim Thurstead

Robin Hayes

Ardal Arcedo Vila

Rob Simmons CT/2

Ron Paul

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Nick Rahall

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Tom Davis

Jim Bell

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Tim Ryan

Betty McCollum

Kendrick B. Meek

Chris Bell

Rush Holt

John B. Larson

James Oberstar

Joe Baca

Jim Saxton

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Rahm Emanuel

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Dan P. Hill

Jim McDermott

Ben Chandler