Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2006

The Honorable Hal Rogers, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
B307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Martin Sabo, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
1116 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Sabo:

As you begin work on the fiscal year 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we strongly urge you to provide increased funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) and Assistance to Firefighters Grant Programs. As you know, although these two programs are each authorized at approximately $1 billion per year, the President's fiscal year 2007 budget requests only $293 million for the Fire Grant Program while zeroing out the SAFER program.

The SAFER program, authorized in 2003, provides much-needed funding for career and volunteer fire departments across America to hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters. This program is critical to the thousands of fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff.

When adequately funded SAFER will bring our nation's fire departments to staffing levels that will improve the safety of our firefighters, and the communities they serve, as they respond to the scene of a fire, auto accident, or other natural or manmade disaster. Two-thirds of all career 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.

Under the SAFER program, fire departments throughout the country are able to apply for federal grants to hire and pay new fire fighters for five years. The federal grant decreases annually on a sliding scale in order to promote complete local self-sufficiency after four years. In addition, grants have been awarded to state and local organizations to recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters.

The SAFER program complements the very successful Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, through which the federal government provides funds for training and equipment to fire

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stations throughout the country. Ensuring that career and volunteer departments have adequate numbers of fire fighters will allow departments to fully utilize the training and equipment money provided through the Fire Grant program.

We are particularly troubled by the trend in Fire Grant funding, which dipped to $545 million in fiscal year 2006 after having been funded at $750 million in fiscal years 2003 and 2004. The early level of funding demonstrated Congress' strong bipartisan support for the Fire Grant program, as well as its understanding of the contributions this program has made to our firefighters and the communities they serve.

Considering that nearly $3 billion in applications were submitted for the current program year, a continued reduction of funds to train and equip our firefighters is simply not good policy. The fact is that this program has positively impacted public safety by providing more than $3 billion since 2001 for infrared cameras, personal protective gear, hazmat detection devices, improved breathing apparatuses, advanced training and fitness programs, fire engines, prevention and education programs, and interoperable communication systems. This is the basic equipment our fire departments need to effectively respond to **all** hazards.

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.

We urge you to help Congress meet that obligation by providing increased funding the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Program in the fiscal year 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Lois Capps | Eman Clean | C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger

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