

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 2, 2007

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Byrd and Ranking Member Cochran:

As you prepare to conference the fiscal year (FY) 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we ask that you include in the conference report funding levels provided by the House of Representatives for two critical homeland security initiatives: the Fire Investment and Response Enhancement (FIRE) Act and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Act.

Initially authorized in FY 2001, the FIRE Act is the first Congressional initiative specifically designed to help meet the needs of fire departments and firefighters. Over the past five years, the FIRE Act has provided almost \$2.8 billion in assistance through 33,000 grants in all fifty states. These resources have enabled fire departments to obtain updated firefighting equipment and improve firefighter training so that they are able to fulfill expanded responsibilities in this post-9/11 world.

The SAFER Act, which was first authorized in FY 2005, provides assistance to fire departments in hiring new firefighters – both paid and volunteer. According to the most recent needs assessment released by the National Fire Protection Association, a majority of fire departments – large and small – lack the number of personnel necessary to fight fires and to respond to other emergencies effectively. To date, the SAFER Act has sought to mitigate this shortage by providing more than \$158 million to 398 departments for the hiring and recruiting of new paid and volunteer firefighters.

In FY 2007, Congress provided \$662 million in support for the FIRE and SAFER Acts. This year, President Bush recommended allocating \$300 million to the FIRE Act and no resources to the SAFER Act. However, the Senate provided \$560 million and \$145 million for the FIRE and SAFER Act grants respectively, while the House provided \$570 million and \$235 million for the FIRE and SAFER grants respectively. The current demand for assistance is over \$4 billion each year. As such, the House funding would meet the greatest amount of need in this coming fiscal year.

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Our nation's firefighters are first-rate and they risk their lives each and every day to ensure our safety. Like our troops overseas, they deserve the best equipment, best training, and best number personnel to do their jobs. We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Chris Dodd

Susan M. Collins

Tom Harkin

Josh Reed

Bobas A. Neuhart

Debbie Stabenow

Dick Durbin

Ben Sanders

Mark Wyden

Noah Coleman

Robert Menendez

Joe Biden

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Tom Carper

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C. D. [unclear]

