

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 2, 2002

## JOIN US IN URGING FULL FUNDING FOR THE ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT PROGRAM

**Deadline to sign on: April 9th**

Dear Colleague:

Please join us in signing the attached letter urging the VA-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee to include \$900 million in the Fiscal Year 2003 VA/HUD appropriations bill to fully fund the grant program created by the FIRE Act, the "Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program."

Now, more than ever, it is critical to fully fund this initiative. September 11<sup>th</sup> was a jarring reminder that firefighters are, and will always be, first responders to any accident, natural disaster, or attack on American soil. As we face the new reality of terrorists who target civilians in the United States, we must do our utmost to equip our firefighters with the resources they need to protect their own lives and those of others.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (commonly known as the FIRE grant) benefits our nation as a whole by providing local fire departments with much-needed resources to respond beyond the borders of their individual jurisdictions to protect interstate commerce, federal lands, and the critical infrastructure of the United States. Local fire departments throughout the nation face numerous challenges ranging from wildland fire protection, natural disaster response, terrorism mitigation training, providing emergency medical services, structural fire suppression, and hazardous materials response. Often, local governments are unable to afford the extensive training and specialized equipment that these activities require. In rural jurisdictions, the need is especially critical. Many rural fire departments make emergency runs using 30 to 40 year old trucks, outdated equipment, and inadequate training. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program would assist local fire departments in many jurisdictions by providing the needed funds to pay for these items.

Nearly 4,000 civilians, including more than 600 children, die in fires each year. Despite the fact that we lead the world in the development of technologies that could save lives, the U.S. fire death rate is one of the highest in the world. By passing the FIRE Act, Congress unequivocally asserted that it is the policy of the United States to help reduce fire deaths by partnering with local officials to provide all necessary and appropriate training and equipment to our firefighters.

Congress reaffirmed its commitment to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program by authorizing \$900 million for the program as part of the 2002 Department of Defense authorization bill. Please join us in urging the VA/HUD Appropriations Subcommittee to maintain the integrity of this program and to appropriate the full \$900 million for Fiscal Year 2003. If you are interested in signing on to this letter, please contact Mia Dell (Pascrell) at 55751.

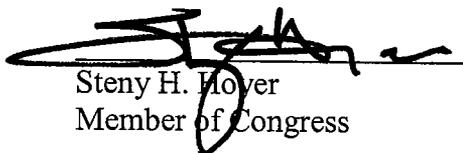
Sincerely,



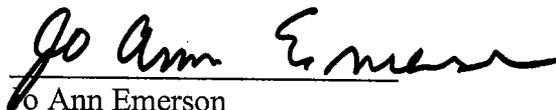
Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Curt Weldon  
Member of Congress



Steny H. Hoyer  
Member of Congress



Jo Ann Emerson  
Member of Congress

The Honorable James T. Walsh,  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on VA, HUD  
and Independent Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H143 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan,  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on VA, HUD  
and Independent Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
H143 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walsh and Representative Mollohan:

We are writing to urge you to include \$900 million in the Fiscal Year 2003 VA/HUD appropriations bill to fully fund the grant program created by the FIRE Act, the "Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program." As you know, in 1999, with overwhelming bipartisan support and leadership in both houses, Congress passed the Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement (FIRE) Act to address the extraordinary health and safety issues faced by the 1.2 million brave men and women of our nation's fire service.

Now, more than ever, it is critical to fully fund this initiative. September 11<sup>th</sup> was a jarring reminder that firefighters are, and will always be, first responders to any accident, natural disaster, or attack on American soil. As we face the new reality of terrorists who target civilians in the United States, we must do our utmost to equip our firefighters with the resources they need to protect their own lives and those of others.

Sadly, many of these true American heroes are exposed to dangers unnecessarily because their fire departments do not have the funds for needed equipment, staffing, and training. In addition to the 343 New York City Fire Department members who lost their lives at the World Trade Center, 98 firefighters died in the line of duty in 2001. Each year, as many as one-third of firefighters suffer debilitating injuries while responding to 17 million calls.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (commonly known as the FIRE grant) is aimed at drastically reducing these numbers. The competitive grant program created by the FIRE Act provides local fire departments, including revenue-poor volunteer departments, with the resources they need to buy safety equipment such as respirators, helmets, and heat-resistant clothing. The program also focuses funding for training, fitness, and wellness programs.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program benefits our nation as a whole by providing local fire departments with much-needed resources to respond beyond the borders of their individual jurisdictions to protect interstate commerce, federal lands, and the critical infrastructure of the United States. Local fire departments throughout the nation face numerous challenges ranging from wildland fire protection, natural disaster response, terrorism mitigation training, providing emergency medical services, structural fire suppression, and hazardous materials response. Often, local governments are unable to afford the extensive training and specialized equipment that these activities require. In rural jurisdictions, the need is especially critical. Many rural fire departments make emergency runs using 30 to 40 year old trucks, outdated equipment, and inadequate training. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program would assist local fire departments in many jurisdictions by providing the needed funds to pay for these items.

Nearly 4,000 civilians, including more than 600 children, die in fires each year. Despite the fact that we lead the world in the development of technologies that could save lives, the U.S. fire death rate is one of the highest in the world. By passing the FIRE Act, Congress unequivocally asserted that it is the policy of the United States to help reduce fire deaths by partnering with local officials to provide all necessary and appropriate training and equipment to our firefighters.

Congress reaffirmed its commitment to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program by authorizing \$900 million for the program as part of the 2002 Department of Defense authorization bill. We urge you to maintain the integrity of this program and to appropriate the full \$900 million for Fiscal Year 2003. The needs are too many and the costs of delay too great to postpone action on this important issue.