

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 14, 2002

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

We are writing to express our strong disagreement with your decision to block the release of \$150 million in the Fiscal Year 2002 Supplemental Appropriations bill to fund the grant program created by the FIRE Act, the "Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program." These funds are desperately needed by fire departments across America.

At yesterday's Economic Forum you announced that you will not release the \$5.1 billion in emergency assistance that Congress appropriated for, among other things, transportation security, fighting the international AIDS epidemic, and anti-terrorism assistance to Israel. Included in this \$5.1 billion is \$150 million for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, a crucial component in our commitment to protect first responders and to save lives.

Firefighters are the anchors of our homeland defense, and your decision to block the release of these funds -while applications for grants are literally pending-is ill-conceived to say the least. For months you and your Administration have lauded firefighters publicly and stressed a commitment to meeting their very real staffing, equipment and training needs.

The firefighters of this nation deserve more than rhetoric. They, and the taxpayers they serve, deserve nothing less than the level of funding Congress has approved.

This program is authorized for \$900 million in Fiscal Year 2002; the additional \$150 million included in the Fiscal Year 2002 Supplemental Appropriations bill would raise this fiscal year's funding level to \$510 million. 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 fund this initiative at the level Congress has overwhelmingly approved. September 11th 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.

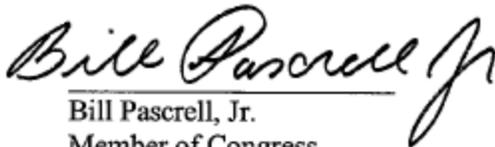
Sadly, many of these true American heroes are exposed to dangers unnecessarily because their fire departments do not have the funds for needed equipment, staffing, and training. In addition to the 343 New York City Fire Department members who lost their lives at the World Trade Center, 98 firefighters 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.

Over 19,500 fire departments submitted grant applications this year, requesting \$2.2 billion in funding. By providing an additional \$150 million in funding, we will be able to assist many more of these worthy departments nationwide.

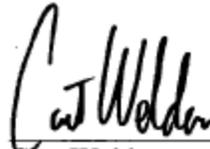
Congress reaffirmed its commitment to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program by providing an additional \$150 million for the program as part of the Fiscal Year 2002 Supplemental Appropriations bill. We urge you to maintain the integrity of this program and **fulfill your stated commitment** to first responders by releasing the \$150 million for Fiscal Year 2002.

The need for this funding is too pressing -- and the cost of delay too great --to postpone action on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Curt Weldon
Member of Congress



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



Ann Emerson
Member of Congress