

Washington, DC -- Tomorrow, the U.S. House of Representatives is expected to approve \$800 million in assistance for local firefighters and first responders, including funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFGP) which has provided over \$1 million to local fire departments in Upstate New York, this year alone. U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) requested additional funding for fire grant programs in a letter to House Appropriators in March.

“It is an honor to support critical funding and continued federal support for the fire departments and first responder agencies of the 24th district, and the brave men and women who keep our communities safe,” said Arcuri, a member of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus. “Many of our small towns and villages depend on federal funding to keep equipment working and purchase new vehicles. Tomorrow’s bill will ensure that localities can update and improve staff training programs and necessary equipment for local fire departments.”

The Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (H.R. 2638) would provide a total of \$36.25 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Homeland Security in fiscal year 2008, including \$4.5 billion for first responder programs and port security grants. These grants were funded at \$4.92 billion in 2004 and have been cut every year since, even as homeland security costs have continued to rise.

H.R. 2638 includes \$800 million, \$138 million above the 2007 funding level, for Fire Grant programs – including AFGP and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program - to address the communication, equipment and staffing problems facing local fire departments.

In March, Arcuri joined 100 Members of Congress in writing to the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee requesting this additional funding for AFGP and SAFER program, which award competitive grants to fire departments to help meet equipment, training and staffing needs.

“I have had the privilege to announce over a dozen Assistance to Firefighters Grants for the hard-working fire departments in our district since taking office. My office has also hosted a grant writing workshop for local departments to help them get critical federal dollars. My staff and I will continue to work hard to assist local departments and first responder agencies throughout the 24th district.”

Since taking office Arcuri has announced 13 Assistance to Firefighters Grants totaling over \$1 million for fire departments in the 24th district. These grants help firefighters and other first responders obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, and training. The SAFER program provides funding for career and volunteer fire departments to hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters.

H.R. 2638 also appropriates:

- \$950 million, \$50 million above the 2007 funding and \$700 million above the President's request, for grants used to plan, equip and train local first responders to respond to terrorist attacks and catastrophic incidents;
- \$400 million, \$225 million above 2007 levels and the President's request, to protect critical transit infrastructure, including rail and ferry systems, in high-threat areas;
- \$300 million, \$100 million above 2007 levels and the President's request, for all-hazard grants for State and local emergency managers; and
- \$50 million for Interoperable Communications Grants to continue a program funded by the Department of Commerce in 2007 to help local police, firefighters and emergency responders to talk to each other during a crisis.

Arcuri is also an original cosponsor the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (H.R. 943) which would provide tax assistance for volunteer emergency responders to help area fire departments retain and recruit volunteers. The 24th district is home to a number of firehouses that rely exclusively on volunteer firefighters.

###