

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) sent a letter earlier this week to House officials urging additional assistance for local firefighters and first responders.

Arcuri joined 100 Members of Congress in writing to the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee requesting additional funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) program which award competitive grants to fire departments to help meet equipment, training and staffing needs.

“The fire departments and first responders in our communities work tirelessly to keep us safe, in turn we owe it to them to provide the resources they need to be protected,” said Arcuri, a member of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus. “It has been a great pleasure to announce over a dozen Assistance to Firefighters Grants for the hard-working fire departments in our district just in the last few months. The hard work and dedication of our first responders allows families throughout the 24th district to sleep easy and wake up safe.”

Since taking office Arcuri has announced 13 Assistance to Firefighters Grants totaling over \$1 million for fire departments in the 24th district. The primary goal of the AFG program is to meet the firefighting and emergency response needs of fire departments and nonaffiliated emergency medical services organizations. Since 2001, AFG has helped firefighters and other first responders to obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training, and other resources needed to protect the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards.

The SAFER program provides funding for career and volunteer fire departments to hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters. Earlier this month, Arcuri cosponsored 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 Congressional District is home to a number of firehouses that rely exclusively on volunteer firefighters.

The Administration’s Fiscal Year 2008 Budget provides only \$300 million for Fire Grants and zero funding for the SAFER Program. Last year, Congress appropriated \$547 million for Fire Grants and \$115 million for SAFER.

Below is the letter Arcuri sent:

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

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

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Rogers:

As you begin work on the fiscal year 2008 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 2008 budget requests only \$300 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 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 was funded at \$547 million in fiscal year 2007 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 more than \$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 \$3.7 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 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Steny Hoyer  
Michael A. Arcuri  
Mark Udall  
Carolyn McCarthy  
Rick Larsen  
Charles Dent  
Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
Ron Paul  
Joe Courtney  
Doris Matsui  
Jim Gerlach  
Jerry McNerney  
Mike Ross  
Zack Space  
Melissa Bean  
Joe Baca  
Stephanie Herseth  
Mike Doyle  
Jay Inslee  
Shelley Berkley  
Ginny Brown-Waite  
Ed Perlmutter  
Chris Carney  
David Scott  
Rich Renzi  
Allyson Schwartz  
John Sarbanes  
Medeleine Z. Bordallo  
James McGovern  
William "Lacy" Clay  
Peter King  
Christopher Murphy  
Jim Costa  
John B. Larson  
Patrick Murphy  
Stephanie Tubbs Jones  
Joe Sestak

Albio Sires  
Todd Russell Platts  
Judy Biggert  
Jim McDermott  
Lois Capps  
Christopher Shays  
Tom Allen  
Hank Johnson  
John Hall  
Dave Reichert  
Mazie K. Hirono  
Linda Sanchez  
Sander Levin  
Peter Welch  
Bruce Braley  
Sam Graves  
Jason Altmire  
Dave Loebsack  
John Boozman  
Kevin McCarthy  
Michael E. Capuano  
Bob Etheridge  
Grace Napolitano  
Gus Bilirakis  
Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Chris Van Hollen  
Russ Carnahan  
Dan Lipinski  
Betty Sutton  
Brad Miller  
Michael Michaud  
Dutch Ruppersberger  
Rick Boucher  
Ike Skelton  
Richard Neal  
Jim Saxton  
Edolphus Towns  
Mel Watt  
Barney Frank  
Rosa DeLauro  
Luis Gutierrez  
Earl Blumenauer  
Elton Gallegly  
John D. Dingell  
Bart Stupak  
Steven Latourrette

Chris Smith  
Adam Smith  
Tom Lantos  
Tim Holden  
Diana DeGette  
Frank LoBiondo  
Bob Filner  
Silvestre Reyes  
Rob Andrews  
Tammy Baldwin  
John Shimkus  
William Delahunt  
Ellen Tauscher  
Bill Pascrell  
Albert R. Wynn

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