



1050 17th Street NW, Suite 490, Washington, DC 20036

April 24, 2007 The Honorable David E. Price The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman Ranking Member House Committee on
Appropriations House Committee on Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee
Homeland Security Subcommittee Washington, DC 20515 Washington, DC
20515

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Rogers: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify at the March 9 hearing, "Preparing for Disaster, Natural or Otherwise," before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Homeland Security. At the hearing, the grant-making process for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program was discussed. Several Committee members expressed concern that political considerations factor into the grant-making process. Other Committee members expressed an interest in converting the AFG from a needs-based program to a risk-based program. I am writing in order to address these issues in greater detail than I was able to during the hearing. The AFG program was created prior to September 11, 2001 and was originally administered by the United States Fire Administration (USFA). The focus of the program from the start has been to bring all fire departments up to a baseline level of readiness. Grants are awarded based on need, as demonstrated by applicants and assessed by panels of fire service professionals that review the applications. This process ensures that the grants go where they are needed most and that the funding is distributed without political consideration. I know from personal experience how absolutely critical the AFG program is for the fire service of America. I have participated in AFG criteria development and peer review for the past six years. I am the chief of the Cherryville Fire Department in North Carolina, where we have received multiple grants through the program. In 2005, my department received personal protective clothing for my firefighters, as well as self-contained breathing apparatus. With the economic turndown, due to the loss of our textile industry, there is no way my jurisdiction would have been able to purchase this critically needed equipment. The AFG has enabled my department to meet our growing fire protection needs for my community. Without this program the citizens and firefighters in my community would be in jeopardy.

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When the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created in 2002, USFA and AFG were merged into it. Today, DHS' Office of Grants and Training administers AFG along with numerous other grant programs intended to improve first response preparedness. In FY 2007, Congress made more than \$2.5 billion available for state and local programs. A majority of these programs use various factors, like population size and density, risk of terrorist attack, and economic impact to distribute funding. These factors decidedly favor large urban and suburban areas. Two of these programs, the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) and the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), exclusively target highly populated areas. The AFG is distinct in that it distributes grants based on need. This approach allows smaller, rural departments like mine to access DHS resources. However, AFG is not exclusively for small departments. Since the program's first year of funding in FY 2002, AFG has provided close to \$750 million to urban and suburban departments. In 2004, the NVFC supported lowering the matching requirement for large departments and increasing the amount of money they could apply for because we believe that the success of this program lies in the fact that it benefits all types and sizes of fire departments. The NVFC believes that the AFG is the premier federal grant program providing assistance to fire departments with the most need. I strongly urge members of this Committee to oppose converting the AFG into a program that distributes money based on risk. Sincerely, Chief Jeff Cash
Cc: Congressman Robert B. Aderholt Congressman John Carter Congressman John Abney Culberson
Congressman Chet Edwards Congressman Sam Farr Congressman Chaka Fattah Congresswoman Kay Granger
Congresswoman Carolyn C. Kilpatrick Congressman Jerry Lewis Congresswoman Nita M. Lowey
Congressman Dave Obey Congressman John E. Peterson Congressman Ciro Rodriguez
Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard Congressman Jose Serrano