Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2016

The Honorable John Carter
Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Homeland Security
B-307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Homeland Security
2230 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Carter and Ranking Member Roybal-Allard:

As you begin work on the fiscal year 2017 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we strongly urge you to provide at least $405 million for the Assistance to Firefighters (FIRE) Grant Program and $405 million for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program.

As you know, having high quality, modern equipment can be a matter of life and death for our nation's firefighters. Through the Committee's past efforts, we have 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. This program has had a profound impact on public safety by providing nearly $7 billion since 2001 for infrared cameras, personal protective gear, hazmat detection devices, improved breathing apparatuses, and interoperable communications systems. This is the basic equipment our fire departments need to effectively respond to all hazards that a firefighter may face on any given call.

However, the nearly $3 billion in applications submitted on average annually demonstrate that there is a great deal of work to be done before all of our communities are sufficiently served by first responders who are well equipped and trained to the highest standard.

The SAFER program provides much-needed resources for career and volunteer fire departments across the nation to hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. This program is critical to the thousands of fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff and with limited funding. When adequately funded, SAFER will bring our nation's fire departments to staffing levels that will improve the safety of our firefighters, as well as the communities they serve, as they respond to the scene of a fire, auto accident, or other natural or manmade disasters. 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. As you well know, 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 departments throughout the country. Ensuring that career and volunteer departments have adequate numbers of firefighters will allow departments to fully utilize the training and equipment funds provided through the FIRE Grant program.

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When accounting for inflation, the FIRE and SAFER programs have experienced a reduction in real dollars, at a time when the economy is still recovering, and costs of personnel, apparatus and training continue to rise. 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 aging or obsolete equipment. We, as a nation 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 funding the Assistance to Firefighters (FIRE) Grant Program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program at $405 million each in the FY2017 Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

Your full and fair consideration of our request is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

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Grace F. Napolitano

Tulsi Gabbard

Juan Vargas

Ami Bera

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