

Murphy Helps Provide Critical Funding for Connecticut First Responders

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Yesterday, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) helped pass H.R. 3791, the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act, a bipartisan bill that supports first responders across the country by reauthorizing two critical programs. With state budgets tighter than ever, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program will provide federal grants to fire departments struggling with budget cuts.

"Firefighters perform one of the most valuable duties of government, and we owe it to these brave men and women to ensure that they get the funding they need to do their jobs safely. This bill will make sure that, for the next five years, many Connecticut fire departments will be able to pay for training and equipment they need to keep our families safe," Murphy said.

A number of Fifth District fire departments, from Meriden to Waterbury, have benefited from the AFG and SAFER programs over the past few years. Just this year, the Brookfield Volunteer Fire Department was awarded \$42,000 through the AFG program to purchase protective equipment for their firefighters.

H.R. 3791 reauthorizes the AFG and SAFER programs for five years, providing a total of over \$2 billion from Fiscal Year 2010 to Fiscal Year 2014. Since the creation of AFG in 2000, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has awarded nearly \$5 billion in grants to local fire departments to purchase equipment and pay for personnel training. Since the beginning of the SAFER Program in 2004, nearly \$700 million has been awarded to help hire additional fire fighters. The International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the National Volunteer Fire Council all support the legislation.

Specifically, the bill makes the AFG program work better for Connecticut firefighters by setting the matching requirements at 10 percent for applicants from jurisdictions of a population of 20,000 or more, and at 5 percent for jurisdictions with populations of less than 20,000. And the bill provides an authorization of \$1 billion per fiscal year from Fiscal Year 2010 to Fiscal Year 2014.

To improve the SAFER program, the bill sets the grant period at three years, sets the local matching requirement at 20 percent per year of the grant, eliminates an artificial cap on the maximum allowable grant size per firefighter, and includes an economic hardship waiver for fire departments that are unable to meet the matching requirements or maintenance of budget requirements. The legislation sets the funding level at \$1.194 billion per fiscal year from Fiscal Year 2010 to Fiscal Year 2014.

The legislation now moves to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

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