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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515-6015

December 22, 2009

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TELEPHONE:
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The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Madam Secretary,

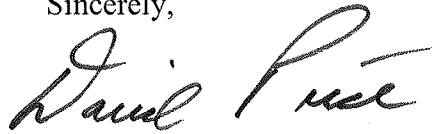
This nation is facing a crisis concerning job loss for firefighters. The International Association of Firefighters estimates that since September 2008, nearly 6,000 firefighter jobs have been lost or will soon be lost due to local budget cuts. In addition, more than 6,000 firefighter positions have been lost to attrition. These figures are not only troubling because of their impact on the nation's economy; I am also concerned that such widespread downsizing among fire companies threatens public safety and local preparedness.

In order to stem the flow of layoffs, Congress provided you with the authority to waive a number of cost sharing and other local matching provisions for both fiscal years 2009 and 2010 in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and the fiscal year 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act. I am writing because I am concerned that the Department's implementation of waiver authority for the Staffing for Adequate Firefighter Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program has not been entirely consistent with Congressional intent, and therefore, is failing to adequately prevent firefighters from being laid off.

Due to the present difficult economic circumstances being experienced by local jurisdictions, I understand the Department has recently revisited the fiscal year 2009 SAFER grant guidance to allow for some waivers under certain circumstances. While I am encouraged by this development, I still believe the Department's guidance falls short. Our intent in including these provisions in the fiscal year 2009 bills was to do as much as possible to assist local fire companies for both fiscal years 2009 and 2010. This includes hiring new firefighters, rehiring firefighters who have been laid off and, most importantly, retaining firefighters whose positions are in danger of being eliminated due to stresses on local and state budgets.

To address this issue, clarifying language is included in the Jobs for Main Street Act, which passed the House on December 16th, 2009. This language is consistent, however, with authority the Department already has. The objective is to allow the Department to support the local fire companies during this time of economic recession to the fullest extent possible. As the Department finalizes its fiscal year 2010 guidance that fire companies will use when applying for SAFER grants, I urge you to carry out the intent of Congress to do everything possible to keep firefighters on the job. My staff or I will be happy to discuss these concerns with you in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Price". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and "P".

David Price
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security Appropriations

Cc: Mr. Craig Fugate, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency