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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

May 29, 2015

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DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Mr. Brian E. Kamoie
Assistant Administrator, Grant Programs Directorate
U.S. Department of Homeland Security / FEMA
500 C Street, SW
Tech World Building
Washington, D.C. 20472-3635

Dear Mr. Kamoie,

Thank you for your efforts to make sure our cities and towns remain as safe as possible.

I am writing regarding the desperate situation of the City of Trenton, the capitol of New Jersey, which I proudly represented for more than three decades before it was taken out of my district in 2013. Many of the firefighters in the Trenton Fire Department (TFD) and their families, however, live outside city limits and in my congressional district, and Trenton remains the heart of the region.

My affection for this historic city is undiminished. On two previous occasions, I worked with your predecessor in helping the city overcome tremendous hurdles that threaten to slash the city's firefighting force by 59 members—nearly a one-third reduction. These firefighters are set to be laid off in July.

Trenton is a city with a population of 85,000 residents who live and/or work in dense proximity in older housing, high-rise senior housing and office buildings, with warehouses and narrow streets similar to other historic cities in the Northeast. An additional 50,000 state workers commute into the city daily, plus visitors to the State Museum, State legislature and colonial-era tourism sites such as The Old Barracks where Washington fought and won the Battle of Trenton.

Today, the local heroes are our firefighters, who protect the city, and they are in need.

Should the layoffs go into effect, the city, already in a financial crisis, will be forced to close four fire companies—two engine, one ladder and one rescue. The rescue company fields the TFD's Tier 3 Haz-Mat team, the only such unit to cover the millions of people in both Mercer County, N.J. and neighboring Bucks County, Pa., and beyond. The TFD runs the lone Tier 3 to cover all of central New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the union.

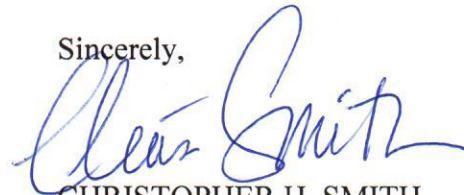
The vital infrastructure the TFD protects includes the AMTRAK Northeast Corridor. The Northeast Corridor flows through the Trenton Transit Center, a highly-utilized line shared by Amtrak, NJ Transit and SEPTA (South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority serving the Greater Philadelphia region). These light and passenger rail services carry thousands of travelers every day to and from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington. CSX and Conrail also run heavy freight lines through Trenton. The horrible May 13, 2015 tragedy that resulted in a multi-fatality derailment is an example of the type of emergencies that can happen on a rail line. The next stop on that ill-fated train was Trenton, N.J. In fact, during the emergency, the TFD was on stand-by to assist with Haz-Mat.

To these salient points I would add that more than a quarter of the residents of Trenton are below the poverty line. With its historic traditional steel, porcelain and other factories shut down and a shrinking tax base, the city is facing tremendous budgetary obstacles. Following huge cuts in state aid and a dismal state budget outlook (not to mention a \$17 million education shortfall leading to one Trenton public school closing and 162 layoffs which were announced this month), the hopes for increased state aid are bleak or non-existent.

The city is seeking a 2015 SAFER grant to remain NFPA compliant and protect the lives of millions of people with the retention of 59 firefighters and the hiring of five new ones. I wholeheartedly endorse their plan as necessary to protect Trenton's residents, workers and visitors and the surrounding areas of New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania.

Please feel free to contact me directly if I can be of any assistance on this important grant.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress

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*The City of Trenton
really needs your
help!*