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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

September 16, 2010

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*DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION*

Ms. Elizabeth Harman  
Assistant Administrator, Grant Programs Directorate  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FEMA  
245 Murray Lane, Building 410  
Washington, D.C. 20528-0410

Dear Ms. Harman,

I am writing to you regarding the desperate situation of the City of Trenton, which is the Capitol of New Jersey and site of George Washington's famous albeit desperate Crossing of the Delaware and Battle of Trenton.

Today the City is at a different desperate crossroads, facing the urban difficulties endemic to a Northeastern city: closing businesses, shrinking tax base, rising costs and aging infrastructures. With the State of New Jersey in a fiscal crisis and nearly bankrupt, it has eliminated \$43 million of state aid to the City. Trenton has nowhere else to turn but the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program.

I recently met with leaders of the Trenton Fire Department, who over the past 20 years have been forced to cut and cut and cut. These City firefighters today are already charged with an arduous task to protect homes and citizens, especially since their numbers were slashed by nearly 70 positions since the early 1990s. There is no fat to be trimmed; they have been cut to the bone. Last year alone, the City suffered 627 fires. In the past 10 years, 18 people have died as a result of fires in Trenton. The additional cuts they now face will gut the fire department and put lives at risk.

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the union, and Trenton is one of the most densely populated cities in New Jersey. Many structures are old buildings dating back one or two centuries, and are especially vulnerable to fire. There are nearly 84,000 residents in the city of only 7.5 miles—that's over 11,149 people per square mile. Additionally, the population of the city increases over 50 percent during working hours due to the State and County offices in the city, as well as the federal Court, Social Security and other federal offices.

The City is trying to retain 61 firefighters who are slated to be laid off on Oct. 22, 2010. The total Federal share of funds being sought through this grant is \$13.685 million for a two-year period.

Ten years ago, the Trenton Fire Department had nine engine companies, four ladder companies and one rescue. Reductions since then have left the department with six engine companies, three ladder companies, and one rescue company. The loss of these 61 jobs will force the closing of four more fire companies: the rescue company, two engine companies, and one ladder company.

If current layoffs take place, the Trenton Fire Department will be:

- Unable to respond to multiple calls
- Unable to comply with NFPA and OSHA standards
- Unable to retain its Rapid Intervention Team
- Forced to eliminate all Mutual Aid operations
- Forced to eliminate its Fire Prevention Unit
- Forced to Eliminate its Fire Force Program for juveniles.

During the national anthrax crisis centered in Mercer County at the Hamilton Post Office and various other sites in September of 2001, the Trenton Fire Department responded to a total of 212 anthrax related Hazardous Material assignments. Agencies throughout Mercer County's 13 towns and population of 366,222 rely on Trenton's Haz-Mat Team 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to handle incidents within their communities. It is the only Tier 3 Haz-Mat in Central New Jersey, and only one of three in the state. The cuts will hurt the Haz-Mat Team and the services they perform.

Since the previous closures, in the districts where engine and ladder companies were shut down the City of Trenton has suffered numerous deaths, injuries and displaced families. Just how many more will be hurt with such a severe reduction in services is frightening to me: how many more will be killed or injured or displaced?

I can think of no more better use of a SAFER grant than to assist those in Trenton who run into burning buildings when all others are running out. For this reason I whole heartedly endorse the application for this grant by city firefighters; FEMA's award of this grant to Trenton will assuredly save lives.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH  
Member of Congress