[DATE]

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [Last Name]:

As the fire chief of the [fire department name] in your state, I ask that you cosponsor S. 829, legislation which would reauthorize the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program (popularly known as the FIRE grant program), including the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program. These programs provide critical training, equipment and staffing for the nation’s fire and emergency service.

When disasters strike, local fire departments are the first to arrive and the last to leave. However, due to the Great Recession, many fire departments still suffer from shortages in basic requirements. Consider the following examples from the National Fire Protection Association’s (NFPA) *Fourth Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service:*

* Fifty percent of all departments (that answered the NFPA survey) do not have enough portable radios to equip all emergency responders on a shift.
* Fifty-three percent of all departments cannot equip all firefighters on a shift with self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).
* An estimated 60% of all departments provide hazmat response but have not formally trained all of their personnel involved in hazmat response.
* Almost three-quarters (72%) of departments reported that some of their personal protective clothing was at least 10 years old, which exceeds the life-cycle of the equipment.

The AFG and SAFER grant programs are both recognized as effective programs that use a merit-based peer review process to provide grants to local fire departments. The AFG program provides equipment and training to help local fire departments prepare for all-hazards. The SAFER grant program helps local fire departments supplement their staffing by hiring career firefighters and recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. The AFG program’s Fire Prevention and Safety grants fund critical scientific research to protect the lives of both firefighters and the civilian population.

I hope that you will cosponsor this bipartisan legislation. S. 829 will play an important role in ensuring that our local fire and EMS departments are prepared for the next emergency, whether it be a major hurricane, hazardous materials incident, roadside accident, or structural fire.

Sincerely,