

STATEMENT

OF

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE  
THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

“AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009  
ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS  
FIRE STATION CONSTRUCTION GRANTS”

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Submitted By:  
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Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Member Mica, and members of the Committee, my name is Ross Ashley and I serve as Assistant Administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Grant Programs Directorate. On behalf of Administrator Fugate, it is a privilege to appear before you today to discuss how FEMA is implementing the Assistance to Firefighters Fire Station Construction Grant Program as provided for under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) (Public Law 111-5), which will improve the capabilities of the Nation's fire service while aiding the economies of many American communities.

FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) is comprised of dedicated professionals with years of experience in the planning, execution, management and monitoring of federal grant programs. Currently GPD manages 52 different disaster and non-disaster grant programs. GPD makes between 6,000 and 7,000 individual grants annually which total between \$7 billion and \$10 billion in federal financial assistance. GPD is proud of its professionalism. It is also proud of its record of cooperation with both the field – the constituencies it serves – and with the Congress, in the development of the programs it administers. Every grant program GPD develops and administers is marked by a high level of outreach, discussion and collaboration with the communities, the individuals, and the stakeholders the grant program is designed to help.

The Assistance to Firefighters Fire Station Construction Grant Program is no different. FEMA and GPD have a long record of working closely with the Nation's fire service. GPD's portfolio includes the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG). The AFG Program provides competitive grants to address the training, safety, apparatus, personal protective gear, firefighting equipment, and firefighter wellness and fitness needs of fire departments large and small, career and volunteer. Through the Fire

Prevention and Safety Grant Program (FP&S), the AFG Program provides resources to fire departments and non-profit organizations to address fire prevention issues, while AFG's companion program, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant Program (SAFER), addresses staffing needs by enhancing these departments' ability to hire, recruit and retain firefighters.

Our partnership with the fire service is demonstrated through the process by which each year's AFG and SAFER Programs are developed. Each year FEMA convenes a panel of fire service professionals to assist in the development of funding priorities for the coming year. This also provides an opportunity to discuss any changes in program requirements. The development of the Assistance to Firefighters Fire Station Construction Grant Program (FSCG) did not differ from the development of GPD's other AFG programs. As with the other AFG programs, GPD consulted and worked with a panel of fire service professionals representing the nine major fire service organizations to develop funding priorities and other implementation criteria for FSCG. These fire service organizations included:

- The Congressional Fire Services Institute;
- The National Volunteer Fire Council;
- The International Association of Arson Investigators;
- The International Association of Fire Fighters;
- The National Fire Protection Association;
- The National Association of State Fire Marshalls;
- The International Association of Fire Chiefs;
- The International Society of Fire Service Instructors, and
- The North American Fire Training Directors.

In keeping with the goals of the ARRA to not only assist the fire service, but more broadly to assist in the economic revitalization of the communities fire departments serve, GPD collaborated with additional stakeholder organizations in the development of the FSCG. These groups represent the Nation's towns, cities, counties and states and included:

- The National Association of Counties
- The National Governors Association
- The National League of Cities
- The U.S. Conference of Mayors

Our collaboration and outreach will extend throughout the FSCG award process. FSCG awards are competitive and will be based on the funding priorities recommended by the fire service and on peer reviews by panels comprised of representatives of the fire service.

The ARRA was signed into law on February 17, 2009 and its objectives are straightforward:

- To preserve and create jobs and promote economic recovery;
- To assist those most impacted by the recession;
- To provide investments needed to increase economic efficiency by spurring technological advances in science and health;
- To invest in transportation, environmental protection, and other infrastructure that will provide long-term economic benefits, and
- To stabilize State and local budgets in order to minimize and avoid reductions in essential services and counterproductive state and local tax increases.

The ARRA provides over \$800 billion including additional federal assistance to State and local communities. Of that, \$510 million was provided to support FEMA's efforts to enhance the security of the Nation's ports and transit systems and to enhance the capabilities of the Nation's fire service by funding the construction, renovation or modification of fire stations. Specifically, the ARRA designated \$210 million to support these fire station construction and renovation efforts.

On May 29, 2009, 100 days after ARRA enactment, FEMA released the grant guidance and application materials for the FSCG Program, thus opening the application period. It is our belief that this initiative will directly assist the Nation in achieving the objectives of the ARRA. Under FSCG, funds will be awarded directly to non-Federal fire departments or to state and local governments that fund or operate fire departments. Under FSCG there is no match or cost share requirement and FSCG funds will cover 100 percent of a project's cost. The immediate result will be an infusion of funding that supports local construction. This local construction will in turn create new jobs, services and purchases, enhancing essential services.

FSCG funds are also a direct investment in public safety. Funding under the FSCG will enable fire departments to replace or renovate unsafe or uninhabitable structures. These investments in infrastructure will enable fire departments to enhance response capabilities and fire protection coverage, better protect communities from fire-related hazards and help ensure firefighter safety.

To maximize the benefit of ARRA funding, FEMA limited funding for each individual project within a grant application to \$5 million. There is, however, no limit on the number of projects that can be included in an application as long as the total amount of funds requested does not exceed the \$15 million statutory cap set forth by ARRA.

FSCG's application period closed on July 10, 2009. By the close, GPD received over 6,000 FSCG applications requesting over \$9 billion in federal assistance. Application reviews are currently underway and we expect that all grants under ARRA' FSCG Program will be awarded before the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my statement by emphasizing the commitment that we at the Department of Homeland Security - from Secretary Napolitano, to Administrator Fugate, to myself - have for the goals of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and for providing the critical assistance being made available through the Fire Station Construction Grant Program. Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Mica and members of the Committee, for allowing me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.