

June 14, 2006

The Honorable Tom Davis, Chairman  
Committee on Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6143

Dear Chairman Davis:

On behalf of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Board of Directors, I would like to thank you for addressing an issue of crucial significance to the National Capital Region.

COG and the National Capital Region Emergency Preparedness Council (EPC) work diligently with the area's jurisdictions to keep area residents and visitors secure, and we remain committed to ensuring that the capabilities we have built over the past four years will continue to keep them safe. However, without the proper level of funding, our ability to further enhance the region's preparedness will be gravely affected.

The Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program provides local governments with much-needed financial assistance to address the unique planning, equipment, training, and exercise needs of this high-risk urban area. Put simply, we can not afford to slow our efforts in enhancing the region's capacity to prevent, respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism. It is vital that we remain properly equipped to provide much-needed resources and support, from protective gear for our first responders to strategic plans for the region's leaders to use during the event of an emergency or terrorist attack.

The current level of funding is disappointing and threatens our capacity to move forward at a reasonable pace. COG and the EPC wish to assure members of Congress of the following:

- Local governments in the National Capital Region will respond quickly and effectively to emergencies in this area, using our own resources if necessary and in close coordination with state and federal officials.
- This region's leaders have invested homeland security funds wisely. We have purchased back-up sets of personal protective gear for first responders, we have adopted systems that allow those first responders to communicate with each other and regional leaders, we are working to secure and protect our water supply and we have strengthened emergency transportation plans.

- Nonetheless, there are tremendous unmet needs in the region. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) identified 37 capabilities that need to be addressed nationally, and DHS asked that we focus on eight of those priorities. Through our own rigorous planning process, six additional target areas were added to make a combined list of 14.
- The impact of the cut in our UASI funds will be serious. Simply stated, we cannot achieve the security improvements this Congress values with the proposed funding level.
- Some have mentioned that the National Capital Region's application was somehow insufficient. Although we believe we followed the instructions we received, let us assure you that we will study all the feedback from DHS and that we are determined to strengthen the application. We are just as committed as we were after 9-11, when we were the first region in the country to respond with a detailed planning process.

We generally support the risk-based approach taken by DHS, but the outcomes are surprising, especially when two-thirds of the determination for the UASI grant is based on the assessed level of risk. Since the events of 9-11, our greatest priority has been an intense commitment to the safety and security of the National Capital Region. That priority and commitment remain strong.

Sincerely,

Jay Fiset, Chair  
COG Board of Directors

Gerry Connolly, Chair  
National Capital Region Emergency  
Preparedness Council