



July 10, 2002

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H 232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard A. Gephardt
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
H 204 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: First Responders Initiative and America's Cities

Dear Speaker Hastert and Leader Gephardt:

America's mayors are 100 percent committed to the homeland war against terrorism. We strongly applauded President Bush for his \$3.5 billion first responders initiative, and have been working closely with Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge and other key members of the Administration to ensure that this funding accomplishes its intended purpose – to both prepare for and prevent any future attacks on our cities and our nation. And we have not been waiting for Federal assistance prior to taking local action. Cities across the nation have spent billions of dollars of our own, mostly unbudgeted, resources to respond to the new homeland war against terrorism.

In expectation of first responder legislation moving forward in the House, we would like to raise with you several key priorities for America's mayors. These priorities reflect the policy adopted and sentiments expressed during our 70th Annual Conference of Mayors held in Madison, Wisconsin on June 14-18 calling for a Homeland Security Block Grant, and reflect our continued conversations with public safety professionals including police chiefs, fire chiefs, emergency managers and public health officials.

Direct Funding for Cities

It is our fervent belief that a majority of the \$3.5 billion program should be provided directly to cities and other local governments. As seen on September 11, it is local police, fire, and emergency management personnel who are the true first responders to terrorism, and we must ensure that these homeland defense forces have the best equipment and training possible. Mayors are extremely concerned with any proposal which could delay needed resources coming to our first responders by sending them through the states, or which could result in cities not receiving much needed support.

We know that concern has been raised over the need for mutual aid agreements. We can assure you that mayors strongly recognize the need for mutual aid, and have been working with our neighboring communities to foster such assistance programs. However, we simply do not agree that the best way to accomplish mutual aid is to institute a system of state control that could delay or prevent needed funding from reaching local governments.

Overtime

It is our strong belief that the first responder initiative must help mayors and their police departments use our more than 650,000 police officers to help *prevent* acts of terrorism in addition to preparing response plans. One of the primary tools in preventing terrorism is the deployment of additional officers through the use of overtime, especially when we move to higher stages of alert as called for in the new Homeland Security Advisory System or to help secure major public events. We have also experienced unavoidable increases in overtime for fire services in response to possible biological and chemical attacks.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that at least a portion of the funding be authorized for overtime assistance under the first responders initiative so that our local police and fire personnel can be fully integrated into the national homeland defense effort and can continue to provide what in many cases may be the best source of domestic intelligence gathering.

Retroactivity/Match

We request that at least a portion of the first responders initiative be authorized for retroactive expenses incurred by cities. Since September 11, cities have incurred billions of dollars in expenses as we have deployed additional public safety officers, purchased new biological, chemical and communications equipment, provided assistance in protecting the nation=s borders, and increased training.

In addition, we request that any match requirement be kept to a minimum to ensure that cities B many of which are dealing with severe budget shortfalls as a result of September 11 and the sagging economy B can in fact take advantage of the first responders assistance.

Federal-Local Partnership

Mayors have always known that for America to continue to prosper, our cities must remain safe and secure. The partnership between mayors and the federal government on law enforcement and homeland security is, now, more important than ever in that we face the joint concerns of domestic terrorism and an upswing in crime rates. We know that by working together, we can ensure that our cities are safe, our citizens live free from fear, and our economy continues to thrive.

The nation=s mayors thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you on this national priority. Please contact Ed Somers with our staff at (202) 861-6706 to further discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Menino
Mayor of Boston
President

James A. Garner
Mayor of Hempstead
Vice President

Donald L. Plusquellic
Mayor of Akron
Advisory Board Chair

J. Thomas Cochran
Executive Director

Cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives