



7852 Walker Drive, Suite 450, Greenbelt, MD 20770

February 5, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Over the past few months, questions about the status of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and whether or not it will remain a part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under your administration have been raised in the media and publicly by various interest groups. At her confirmation hearing recently, DHS Secretary Napolitano testified that, "The issue of FEMA's status is not a simple one and does not lend itself to short answers or merely reactive measures." On behalf of the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) and the more than one million volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel in the United States of America, I urge you to retain FEMA as a component of DHS.

In 2006, the NVFC supported Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, which passed as part of the FY 2007 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act and strengthened FEMA within DHS in several different ways, including: transferring agencies such as the United States Fire Administration (USFA), which had been removed from FEMA when it was merged into DHS, back under FEMA's control; creating statutory protections for FEMA within DHS similar to those extended to the Coast Guard to ensure that FEMA retained some level of autonomy; and establishing that the FEMA Administrator should report directly to the President during major emergencies.

FEMA has made great strides since passage of the FY 2007 DHS Appropriations bill, nearly doubling the number of full-time staff it employs, strengthening regional offices that engage in pre-disaster planning with state and local stakeholders, hiring people with experience as emergency managers and first responders and implementing more of a forward-leaning, less reactive approach to emergency response. Additionally, outgoing FEMA Administrator David Paulison recently gave an interview with *Congressional Quarterly* in which he dismissed one of the major arguments for making FEMA an independent agency; that FEMA needs to be independent in order for the Administrator to have direct access to the President:

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"I think the people who are talking about pulling FEMA outside of Homeland Security haven't experienced it inside Homeland Security. They keep using arguments [that] really aren't problems. Why don't you have direct access to the president? Well, guess what? The president calls me at home while I'm eating Cheerios in the morning... Who flies with him on Air Force One when he goes to disasters? It's me. Who briefs the cabinet and the president on disasters? It's me. So I don't have that problem of having access to the president and I'm not even the same party. It's the president's relationship with the FEMA administrator that's important, and that's happened, so why would you take it out?"

Within DHS, FEMA has access to resources from agencies like the Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the United States Coast Guard that it would lose if it was re-established as an independent agency. An independent FEMA would take with it agencies, like USFA, that have become vital to the continued success of DHS. Separating FEMA from DHS would weaken both agencies by eliminating synergies and potentially creating overlapping authorities.

Finally, the NVFC believes that FEMA and DHS need to be given time under their relatively new structure to develop and succeed. Passage of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 marked the second time in five years that FEMA had been reorganized - the first being when it was merged into DHS in 2003. Another reorganization now would unnecessarily create a new round of bureaucratic reshuffling just as FEMA is settling into its role as currently constituted.

We look forward to working with you on this and other matters. If you have any questions regarding this letter please feel free to contact me directly, or Director of Government Relations Dave Finger at (202) 887-5700 or dfinger@nvfc.org.

Sincerely,

Philip C. Stittleburg
Chairman