

Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

HSGAC Business Meeting

April 28, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since we have a very busy agenda, I will keep my remarks brief and focused on the FIRE and SAFER grants reauthorization bill before us today.

As Members of this Committee know, I have been an ardent supporter of our nation's fire services. In addition to serving as a co-chair of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, I was co-sponsor of the original FIRE Act and an original co-sponsor of the FIRE Act reauthorization bill in 2004. I am pleased to join Senators Lieberman, McCain, Carper, and Dodd as an original co-sponsor of this effort to reauthorize a vital program.

The fire grant is one of the most successful programs administered by the Department of Homeland Security. It is an efficient and effective model for delivering grant funding because it is peer-reviewed and monies are provided directly to local fire departments.

In visits across Maine, I have seen first hand how these grants build the critical response capabilities of local fire departments. Maine has received more than \$50 million under this program - a testament to the needs of our often rural, volunteer fire departments and proof that the program is succeeding in delivering funds to communities that need it most.

Indeed, independent analysis by objective parties confirms that the fire grant program has been effective. In May 2003, the U.S. Fire Administration released the first independent evaluation of the program. Conducted

by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Leadership Development Academy Executive Potential Program, the survey concluded that the program was "highly effective in improving the readiness and capabilities of firefighters across the nation."

Another evaluation was released by the DHS Inspector General in September 2003. That report found the program "succeeded in achieving a balanced distribution of funding through a competitive grant process." And, to quote a 2007 study by the National Academy of Public Administration, "From the standpoint of administrative efficiency, there is broad agreement among stakeholders and observers that the program has been well run. It is a positive case study in the management of a grant program by a government agency."

The bill we consider today is the result of many months of hard work, negotiation, and compromise. While this bill is not a perfect solution, I believe it retains and builds upon the most important provisions that enabled the Fire Act grant program to be successful in the first place – a competitive process for evaluating applications, awards made directly to local communities, and a proven peer review process that functions well. Because of this bill, fire departments will continue to receive the support they need to purchase equipment and vehicles and conduct the training and exercises necessary to perform their jobs well.

Mr. Chairman, I believe this bill will increase the capabilities of our nation's fire services, and protect the thousands of firefighters and EMTs who put their lives on the line every day. And I am proud to join you in

**supporting it. I urge my colleagues to support this
legislation.**

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