



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

News

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TRENTON MAYOR ERIC JACKSON SAYS TEAMWORK PREVENTED DEVASTATING FIREFIGHTER LAYOFFS AND DEMORALIZING DEMOTIONS FOR THE CITY'S ALL-HAZARD-READY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Trenton, N.J. — A collaborative effort mounted by New Jersey's Congressional and Senatorial delegations, grant writer Lisa Willever, former Trenton Fire Chief John Gribbin and firefighter Mark Robotin, has successfully captured more than \$14 million in funding from the federally funded SAFER grant program, Mayor Eric Jackson announced today. As a result, 61 45-day layoff notices that state law required to be issued in August, are rescinded.

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to U.S. Representatives Bonnie Watson Coleman and Chris Smith, U.S. Senator Cory Booker, Lisa Willever, Chief John Gribbin and Mark Robotin for their counsel, advocacy and hard work in organizing an effective SAFER grant application," said Mayor Jackson. "They conveyed an incontrovertible argument as to why Trenton should receive this vital funding for our fire department. These leaders exemplify how working together in common cause can result in powerful outcomes."

SAFER, which stands for Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), is a grant program funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Congress appropriated funds for the program in 2003. The grants provide assistance to fire departments to increase the number of frontline firefighters, increase their staffing and deployment capabilities, and help provide communities with adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards.

Two-year SAFER funding awards can pay the salaries and benefits of firefighters and can also be used to rehire laid-off firefighters, retain firefighters who are facing layoffs, hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. If Trenton had not received a grant award, 61 firefighters would have been laid off, 18 captains demoted to firefighters and two battalion chiefs demoted to captains.

U.S. Senator Cory Booker emphasized his continued commitment to working at the federal and local levels to strengthen the quality of New Jersey's emergency services.

"Trenton's firefighters valiantly put their lives on the line every day to keep their city safe," said Senator Booker. "This much-deserved and much-needed funding will ensure that Trenton's Fire Department is able to operate in a way that protects its firefighters and the communities they serve."

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U.S. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman added that Trenton's residents should rest easy knowing that a full and dedicated firefighting force is ready to act. In addition, the families of these public servants can take comfort in knowing that their livelihoods are safe.

"Keeping our communities safe is a priority that calls us to work beyond party lines and across all levels of government. I am proud that we were able to come together to protect the Trenton community and the jobs of the dedicated men and women of Trenton's Fire Department," said Congresswoman Watson Coleman.

The city has received the two-year SAFER grant twice in the last four years: \$13.6 million in 2010 and \$14.9 million in 2012. This year's grant award is \$14,076,912. With this third award, Trenton has garnered more than \$42 million in assistance from FEMA to fund its fire department. Trenton's Fire Department has a total operating budget of \$23.5 million and is comprised of seven fire houses, seven engine companies, three ladder companies and a heavy rescue company. The department's personnel include the fire and emergency services director, a deputy chief, 10 battalion chiefs, 44 captains and 170 firefighters.

"Being part of the team that has saved the jobs of those who save the lives of Trentonians, day workers and visitors is always an honor," said grant writer Willever. "While Congressman Smith humbly refers to our team as 'the trio,' we believe we are more of a quartet. This is wonderful news for the department and for our capital city, and we thank Mayor Eric Jackson for his support of our efforts."

U.S. Representative Chris Smith, an ardent supporter of the city of Trenton and its fire department, has supported all three SAFER grant applications. As a result of his dedication, the city was not forced to lay off one-third of the department. Recognizing the devastation that such layoffs would mean for Trenton, Congressman Smith has continued to provide his expertise throughout the entire process in order to avert disastrous consequences.

"This grant is first and foremost about public safety and about firefighters whose life-saving jobs are slated for elimination," said Congressman Smith. "Trenton is the historic capital of New Jersey, and this grant helps protect the many thousands of people who live, work and visit the city. Of course, it's also good news for the firefighters personally and their families who have been facing a bleak summer if the layoffs had gone through as planned."

Retired Fire Chief John Gribbin said that the SAFER grant award is great news for the citizens of the city and the Trenton firefighters and their families.

"My sincere thanks to Congressman Chris Smith, congressional aide Jeff Sagnip and his entire staff for their support," said Gribbin. "I also extend my thanks to Mayor Eric Jackson and members of the Trenton City Council."

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