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Prepared by Bruce Hoover  
Fire Chief  
Fargo Fire Department  
Fargo, North Dakota

My name is Bruce Hoover and I am the Fargo Fire Chief.

As a member of North Dakota's fire service, and chief of the fire department in the largest city in North Dakota, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I am going to address the importance of federal assistance in providing quality emergency services for the citizens of North Dakota.

North Dakota emergency responders are acutely aware that no political subdivision within the state has the resources to successfully mitigate large emergencies without assistance from other agencies and jurisdictions. I take a great deal of pride in stating that Fargo is a role model for inter-agency and inter-jurisdiction cooperation among emergency responders. This cooperation is demonstrated in the following:

- Red River Regional Dispatch Center: This center is the public safety answering point and dispatch service for all political subdivisions in Clay County, Minnesota. It also services all political subdivisions in Cass County, North Dakota with the exception the city of West Fargo.
- The Moorhead/Fargo Hazardous Materials Response Team provides service for all of Cass County, North Dakota and several counties in Minnesota.
- Cass County and the City of Fargo have a joint powers agreement that provides consistent Emergency Management services to the city and county.
- Numerous functions within law enforcement demonstrate similar levels of cooperation.

Inter-agency and inter-jurisdiction cooperation have benefited all involved communities but we still have additional needs. Federal funding has been helpful in this regard. For example:

- An interoperable radio communications system is nearly complete for all emergency responders in Cass County, North Dakota, and Clay County, Minnesota. Federal funds made this major project a reality.
- Homeland security funds have been used to provide a response vehicle for emergency response to hazardous materials incidents.

I am concerned with funding issues as we have additional needs. These needs are well beyond what we can fund through our budget.

- Communities throughout the state of North Dakota have the expectation that emergency services in larger cities will be available to respond to emergencies in small communities. Although we wish to be good neighbors, we do not have the resources to provide all of the services we need within our own jurisdiction, much

less for others. The current method of distributing Homeland security funds to the state, and the state distributing them to local jurisdictions has intensified this problem as those communities that have made a commitment to public safety are not recognized and many of the funds have been distributed to communities with no capability to respond to emergencies. A method of allocation that provides funds to population centers would be helpful.

- The cost of specialized equipment is very high and places an unreasonable burden on the citizens of an individual city when there is the expectation that it will be available to multiple jurisdictions.
- Currently, it appears that there is no program in place to protect investments made with Homeland Security Funding. Funding for WMD response equipment requires a long term commitment due to the short life expectancy and high maintenance costs of equipment such as monitors, chemical protective suits, and other personal protective equipment. We do not have the funds locally to make this commitment.
- The expectation that larger communities will provide emergency services to smaller communities will require that funds be allocated to begin provision of those services, and that a base level of funding continue to cover the expense of maintaining and replacing response resources. Personal protective equipment and monitoring equipment have a life expectancy of five years or less. Locally we have equipment that has reached the end of its life expectancy and we cannot afford to replace it.

There are several federal programs and funding sources that have been valuable to our department and fire departments throughout the state.

- Assistance to Fire Fighter Grants,
- Homeland Security Funds,
- Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants (SAFER),
- Emergency Management Performance Grants,
- COPS grants (used for interoperable communication equipment), and
- National Fire Administration and National Fire Academy.

I will provide a brief discussion of the value of each of these to our jurisdiction.

#### Assistance to Fire Fighter Grants:

The city of Fargo has benefited from these funds for safety equipment and training. I feel they are particularly valuable to less populous states and I would like to see funding continued at the current level.

#### Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants (SAFER):

These grants provide an extremely limited number of new positions. The criteria for funding positions with these grants are very narrow (funding priorities are based on NFPA 1710), as it must be for such a small pool of funds and such a significant need. If this program continues I feel that greater value would be achieved by adding additional considerations, these include:

- Communities that have identified significant risks,
- Communities with the capability to respond locally and through out the state,

- Communities with an increased demand for emergency services.

Homeland Security Funds and Emergency Management Performance Grants:

These funds are extremely valuable in communities such as Fargo and Cass County. Our communities have invested significant resources in identifying potential risks and planning to minimize the effect of these risks on our communities should a problem arise. These funds are distributed throughout the state, and like the Homeland Security Funds, appear to be distributed with little concern for potential risks or the size of the population at risk. A method of direct distribution to local jurisdictions would be beneficial.

National Fire Administration and National Fire Academy:

These national functions are very valuable to less populous states such as North Dakota as we lack the resources to develop our own training programs. Many larger cities can afford to develop jurisdiction specific training programs. There is no fire department in North Dakota with this ability. I ask that funding for the National Fire Academy be a priority. The demands on the fire service are growing every year, yet the fire academy lacks the funds to develop programs and courses that address these growing demands. Additional funds for program and course development are particularly valuable to rural states.

An additional consideration with regard to the National Fire Administration is the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). This is a cumbersome and out dated system. For example, the Fargo Fire Department completes an incident report for each emergency we respond to. Monthly, these reports are sent to the state, and the state makes annual reports to the National Fire Administration. With this system it can take two years to identify a trend in response issues. The fire service of today is very dynamic and this system is no longer adequate. If a web based reporting system could be developed, reports could be filed daily and trends could be identified immediately.

If you have any questions I will be happy respond to them.

Thank you again for the assistance our department has received, and thank you for providing me with the opportunity to comment today.