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December 13, 2002

The Honorable John D. Ashcroft
Attorney General of the United States
U.S Department of Justice
10th Street and Constitution Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

We write to express our concerns about the Department of Justice's recent decision to delay the award of an estimated $1.5 billion in law enforcement and antiterrorism assistance allocated by Congress to local police departments and emergency agencies, and ask that you immediately release this critical funding. If we really mean to make fighting terrorism our top priority, we must be willing to do more than reorganize agencies, we need to expend time and resources; and cutting off this funding is a drastic and serious step in the wrong direction.

As we learned from the tragic events of September 11th, first responders are our first line of defense against a terrorist attack. The heroism of police officers and firefighters saved numerous lives on September 11th, but tragically many also perished as a result of equipment and training that was ill-suited for such a large-scale emergency. It has since become apparent that providing our first responders with the appropriate resources is an essential link in our efforts to protect America from terrorist threats. The Department's hold on approximately $1.5 billion funds, however, will affect grants to equip rescue workers, firefighters, police officers and handlers of hazardous material. With state and local law enforcement agencies already facing fiscal crises, this hold threatens to cripple agencies in the event of an attack in the upcoming months.

Your decision not to release the funds is also a severe setback for our Nation's Community Oriented Policing Program ("COPS"). Since its inception in 1995, we have added over 100,000 local police officers under COPS, which has had no small part in the decrease in our nation's crime rate in the last seven years. The COPS program is more important now than ever as local law enforcement agencies struggle to meet the increased demand on resources and staff created by federal initiatives designed to protect against the threat of terrorist attacks. The decision to withhold funds will severely cripple COPS from securing our streets from both crime and terrorism.

With our state and local governments mired in a fiscal crisis, your decision to withhold these funds will no doubt translate into reduced preparedness, and may well impair the safety of our nation's citizens. We urge you to promptly disperse these essential funds to first responders and local law enforcement officials.

Sincerely,

John Conyers, Jr.

Barney Frank

Howard L. Berman

Rick Boucher

Jerrold Nadler

Robert C. Scott

Zoe Lofgren

Sheila Jackson Lee

Martin T. Meehan

Robert Wexler

William D. Delahunt

Anthony D. Weiner

Tammy Baldwin

Adam B. Schiff

cc: Hon. F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee