

TO: File
FR: Jonathan B Kohan (Contact Number: 516 316 0123
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**RE: Request for 2008-2009 Budgetary Funding Support for the
Department of State- Office of Fire Prevention and Control Initiative to
Expand New York State's Urban Search and Rescue Program.**

BY EMAIL AND REGULAR MAIL
BudgetDevelopment@Budget.state.ny.us

Introduction:

I apologize for not having been able to appear at the recent Town Hall Meeting of November 30, 2007 that was held on Long Island to discuss the upcoming New York State Budget. Thank you for the opportunity to offer suggestions in written form at this early stage of budget's development.

The Division of Budget is uniquely positioned in state government to see that investments in initiatives such as the one discussed below that promotes public safety are given priority or due course and a fair hearing within the process. I hope that the Division of Budget can recognize the overall conferred benefit to the residents of the state of New York is far outweighed by the funding of this initiative than by the failure of not supporting this initiative within the 2008-2009 budget.

While there is support for this initiative from within the first responder community statewide, these comments submitted today reflect my personal opinion. I have been involved in the volunteer fire and rescue services in New York State since 1976. In that capacity, I have witnessed first hand the effects of weather related and WMD events on the residents of the State of New York. Additionally over the course of the past fifteen years, at the request of certain elected officials at the local, state and national levels, as a private citizen, I have undertaken certain policy related projects addressing the issues of urban search and rescue, emergency management and homeland security.

The Legislation and the Law:

Earlier this year, the New York State Legislature passed S 3650, which legislation provided to amend Executive Law 43 to (1) create additional urban search and rescue teams, specialty rescue teams and incident support teams in New York State; (2) Authorizes the State Fire Administrator to train, establish, support, maintain and fund urban search and rescue, specialty rescue and incident support teams throughout New York State; (3) Authorizes the State Fire Administrator to establish pre positioned teams located for maximum response within New York State; (4) Authorizes the State Fire Administrator to train first responders and to establish an accreditation program to insure compliance with New York State and Federal Response Guidelines and (5) **Authorizes the Secretary of State and the State Fire Administrator to expend the necessary monies for training, equipment and support of the program.** (Emphasis added by writer)

The above legislation was signed into law by Governor Spitzer on July 17, 2007. Both the legislature and the governor's office had designated this as a "bill of necessity" and Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg described the bill as "the most significant piece of public safety legislation to be passed in 2007." Failure to provide funding for this initiative within the budget thwarts the intentions of our States Chief Executive and the Legislature.

What the Funding will accomplish:

Funding of this initiative will permit OFPC to work effectively to prepare, prevent, and insure that New York's first responders can respond to future disasters, whether they are weather or WMD related.

Funding of this initiative, will amongst other things, permit OFPC to establish a series of highly trained regional teams disbursed throughout the State with dedicated resources to respond to weather related and WMD emergencies. OFPC already serves as the lead state agency in this regard and has done so since 1998 with respect to the coordination of technical urban search and rescue services. The expansion of the program will permit a faster response in a time of need and will, in addition, enhance the credentialing, education and resource typing of our State's first responders resources and personnel to be in compliance with the National Response Plan.

Conclusion:

The State may be confronting an operating deficit for the upcoming fiscal year but that must not interfere with the State's commitment to provide for the safety of its residents. In past deficit years, choices have been made. Should the State elect not to fund this initiative to meet the challenges it clearly faces and as might be required under the National and States own Response Plan, the State will be choosing to put its' residents at substantial risk. That choice might be penny wise for this fiscal year, but pound foolish for all New Yorkers on a going forward basis. This initiative should receive the requested funding because your life, the lives of your family and friends and the lives of the citizens of the State of New York depend on it.

Thank you.