

May 21, 2003

Senator Thad Cochran
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
135 Dirkson Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cochran:

I appreciate this opportunity to respond to a request from your office regarding Homeland Security funding for private for profit entities such as ambulance providers. Based on the guidelines from the Department of Homeland Security and what I believe is the intent of Congress I will attempt to address all your concerns in this matter.

On April 16, 2002, Governor Musgrove designated me as the Director of Homeland Security for the State of Mississippi. I immediately established the Mississippi Office of Homeland Security within the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. The challenge from the beginning has been to develop a multi-disciplined, multi-jurisdictional capability at every level of government. To accomplish this task means tearing down the "stovepipes" and overcoming the turf wars that have existed for decades between the various first responder disciplines. My goal is to overcome these barriers and equip and train first responders to become part of a multi-disciplined, multi-jurisdictional team and ultimately ensure the safety and security of all citizens of the State of Mississippi.

Once the FY 03 funding for Homeland Security was announced, our office developed a distribution formula for the equipment portion. The formula contained a base allocation that was the same for every county. It also contained an additional allocation if the county were a member of the Statewide Mutual Aid Compact (SMAC), and a population allocation. Cities within each county with a population of 10,000 or more received a proportionate amount of the total county allocation based on the population of that county that resided within the legal boundaries of that city. Thus a jurisdiction's allocation is based on "at risk" population. With this formula we were able to provide what I feel is a positive first step in building a response capability statewide. A copy of jurisdictions allocated funds from the FY 03 appropriation and the amount they were allocated may be viewed at our homeland security website, www.homelandsecurity.ms.gov.

Funds have been and will continue to be awarded to jurisdictions (cities and counties) intentionally to force cooperation between the various disciplines at the local level. Distribution of funds directly to a discipline will be counterproductive and widen the gap of cooperation that existed prior to September 11. In cases where private for profit companies provide ambulance service for a jurisdiction, the provider is responsible for the basic supplies to provide that service within the scope of their contract. Even though I recognize that private for profit EMS providers are a critical component of our response capability, I cannot provide this funding to these entities. Jurisdictions have been encouraged to include these EMS providers in their considerations for priorities and equipment purchases. The decision for what equipment will be purchased will and must lie totally with the local jurisdiction based on needs. We have researched the options available to address the private EMS providers and found that a city or county may purchase equipment to be used by the EMS provider but this equipment must remain the property of the jurisdiction. If the EMS provider loses the contract with the jurisdiction, equipment purchased with public funds on loan must be returned to the jurisdiction that purchased the equipment.

The FY 03 Supplemental funds have been announced and Mississippi is currently preparing our application to receive all of the funds made available to us. We are working on a formula for distribution of these funds that will result in every village, town, city and county with a police and/or fire department, receiving some funds to purchase the basic equipment to prepare for WMD incidents.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, working with appropriate local, state and federal agencies, is developing a comprehensive plan for the effective and efficient use of all planning, training and exercise funds. This approach will result in a single comprehensive plan at the state and local level, and a standardized training and exercise plan that supports the federal and state comprehensive plan that ensures the safety and security of all citizens of the State of Mississippi.

As always, I appreciate your assistance as we work together to protect the citizens of Mississippi. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance to you in this matter.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Latham, Jr
Executive Director

CC: Governor Ronnie Musgrove