

Congresswoman Matsui Requests GAO Investigation of Urban Area Security Initiative Grant Program L

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GAO Investigation of Urban Area Security Initiative Grant Program

Leads California Coalition

June 13, 2006

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requested an investigation (PDF) of the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program by the Government Accountability Office in light of the questions and concerns surrounding the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) criteria for eligibility. In January DHS announced revised eligibility guidelines for the UASI grant, because of which both Sacramento and San Diego may no longer eligible to apply. Joining the Congresswoman in placing this request are Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie Thompson, and Representatives Bob Filner, Mike Thompson and Susan Davis. "Despite repeated attempts, DHS has refused to provide the information to explain how this decision was made. This is unacceptable," Congresswoman Matsui emphatically stated. "We have a responsibility to protect this nation to the best of our ability. And with limited resources we need to ensure accountability for the decisions that are being made. DHS has a responsibility to explain their actions." The text of the letter follows: June 12, 2006 Mr. David M. Walker Comptroller General U.S. General Accountability Office Washington, D.C. 20548 Dear Mr. Walker: This letter is to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program. Specifically the GAO should examine whether DHS's criteria and process for determining eligibility for the UASI grant accurately takes into account the risks faced by urban areas. In January, the Department of Homeland Security announced areas eligible for Fiscal Year 2006 UASI grants. For the first time, Sacramento and San Diego were not identified as high-risk areas, although they have received UASI funding in the past. Therefore, these cities are only eligible this year for "sustainment funding" and will not be eligible next year. Sacramento is the capital of the most populous state in the nation and home to dozens of critical federal and state government buildings. In addition, much of the state's water, electricity, and telecommunication systems are managed from Sacramento. The San Diego area contains the nation's 7th-largest city adjacent to a heavily-trafficked international border, a busy port, tourist attractions, and major military installations. We seek your analysis of the following aspects of the UASI eligibility determination process:

Is the Department considering the proper input data? Has it left out relevant data?

Is the input data reliable and valid?

Are the input data being weighted properly?

Are the parameters of the eligible areas appropriate? In particular, does the process reflect an unfair bias against urban areas where critical infrastructure is set outside a ten-mile buffer area?

How does a grant applicant's past performance in accomplishing its preparedness objectives influence future awards?

Is there sufficient local and private sector involvement in determining how areas are evaluated, and performing those evaluations?

Does the risk assessment process adequately account for the unique missions and strategic significance of major military installations?

Have risks to military personnel, and the off-base local infrastructure upon which they depend, been adequately addressed for urban areas with military installations?

Does the risk assessment process adequately account for the vulnerabilities and local law enforcement responsibilities associated with proximity to an international border?

Does the process adequately account for the cascading societal and economic effects of an attack?

Unfortunately, our conversations with DHS officials have not given us confidence that UASI eligibility determinations for Fiscal Year 2006 were appropriate. Because the Department will begin determining Fiscal Year 2007 UASI grant eligibility within a few months, there is an urgent need to identify and address flaws in the current process. We therefore ask you to immediately initiate an investigation.

Sincerely,

Barbara Boxer
States Senator
DavisMember of Congress

Doris O. MatsuiUnited States Senator
Member of Congress Bob Filner

Member of Congress
Mike ThompsonMember

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