

## **SAFER Speech for Governor Kaine**

Thank you, Chairman Zimmerman. Good afternoon Chief Schwartz, members of the Arlington County Board, members of the Arlington County Fire Department, Executive Director Hyde, and distinguished guests.

Today marks an extraordinary day for Arlington County and the Arlington County Fire Department. Eight hopeful students are attending the Arlington County Fire Training Academy, thanks to an \$800,000 grant from the United States Department of Homeland Security.

The role of a firefighter has changed dramatically over the last few years. Today's firefighter faces daily interactions with hazardous materials, terrorism response, arson, swift water rescue, and motor vehicle rescue. There is no lack of courage or bravery from today's fire service. But what we are lacking is better resources - including personnel - to perform an extremely difficult and ever changing job. As the job functions for firefighters have increased over the years so have the associated safety risks.

Through the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Program – more familiarly termed SAFER - federal grants are available to assist volunteer, combination, and career fire departments increase their cadre of firefighters to an acceptable standard that will help ensure safe fire ground operations.

After hearing about safety issues that face fire departments today and risks associated with inadequate staffing, my predecessor, Governor Mark Warner and members the Virginia General Assembly answered the call-to-action by appropriating \$250,000 of the 2006 Virginia General Fund towards the SAFER Matching Grant Fund. It is an honor to represent a Commonwealth committed to public safety and I am proud to say that Virginia is the only state to provide the necessary first year funding match required for the hiring component of the SAFER Program.

Chairman Zimmerman, members of the Arlington County Board and members of the Arlington County Fire Department, I commend your acknowledgement of the moral and ethical obligation to provide a greater level of safety for our firefighters and citizens and your ability to recognize there is no dollar figure associated with the life of a firefighter.

It is my extreme pleasure to present the Arlington County Board with a check for \$32,000 to be used towards the costs associated with hiring these 8 new recruits. My hope is that these funds will enhance the public safety efforts of an already progressive County.