

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Dirksen Senate Office Building 135
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Dirksen Senate Office Building 156
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Support for MSHA Mine Rescue Equipment

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Mikulski, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

We are writing to urge the Committee on Appropriations and the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies to provide \$6 million in Fiscal Year 2017 funding to fully equip all U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) mine rescue teams with next generation mine rescue communications equipment.

MSHA currently has several field offices with federal mine rescue capabilities including: Price, Utah; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Denver, Colorado; Beckley, West Virginia; and Madisonville, Kentucky. Currently, MSHA only has fully equipped communication and tracking systems in Pittsburgh and Denver. The current MSHA response plan and equipment allocation potentially requires long transport times staged from these two locations when supporting any underground mining accident.

Since the passage of the Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response (MINER) Act in 2006, wireless mine safety communications and tracking technology has made everyday mining operations significantly safer and more efficient. However, until recently these technological advances have not been available to mine rescue first responders.

The need for rapidly deployable, lightweight and rugged communication and tracking systems, including atmospheric sensors, to support mine rescue first responders, is of high priority to the over 300 mine rescue teams (federal, state and private) in the U.S. This technology has been proven in actual deployments across the country over the past several years.

Recent examples include supporting a Colorado gold mine recovery operation, a salt mine fire in Texas, and a coal mine accident in Indiana. Rescue operations, which once took days, now can be completed in hours if equipment and teams are readily available.

Traditional communications systems used during mine rescue are tedious, slow and ineffective, and require running spools of cable with page phones or radios. Running cumbersome communications cable to coordinate mine rescue operations delays the mine rescue mission and unnecessarily puts rescuers at risk. In comparison, the deployment of wireless technology is more effective and reliable, which makes a significant difference when mine rescue teams have a short window of time in which to perform. For the past several years, MSHA has worked with industry to develop next generation wireless mine rescue communication capabilities for federal mine rescue teams, to significantly reduce response time after mining accidents.

Accordingly, please include \$6 million in the Fiscal Year 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act in order to fully equip all MSHA mine rescue teams with next generation mine rescue communications equipment and provide the critical support our nation's mine rescue teams deserve

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Joe Manchin
United States Senator