

Washington, DC (May 17, 2012) – U.S. Representatives Gus Bilirakis (FL-09) and Kathy Castor (FL-11) are working together to keep a Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team (CST) based in the Tampa Bay area. The Department of Defense has proposed a plan to eliminate just two teams in the United States, one in Clearwater and one in Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn.

Bilirakis and Castor have offered a budget neutral amendment that will be included in the National Defense Authorization Act, which the House will vote on this Friday. The amendment would increase the number of authorized National Guard Civil Support Teams from 55 to 57, keeping the Clearwater team intact.

A CST is trained to detect weapons of mass destruction – including any type of chemical, biological, or nuclear incident – and then help local emergency responders take steps to ensure public safety.

During its latest budget proposal, the Administration proposed cutting two teams – one in Brooklyn, N.Y. and one in Clearwater, Fla. New York and Florida each have two teams due to their populations, locations, and threats, and removing one team would leave the state much more vulnerable in the wake of an attack or disaster.

Bilirakis, a Republican, and Castor, a Democrat, have teamed up in a bipartisan way to save the Clearwater team.

"These units play important roles in critical areas of our country," Bilirakis said. "The Tampa Bay area has a large population, and vital military operations, so it makes sense that the region retains its Civil Support Team should we face the unfathomable task of responding to a chemical, biological, or nuclear event in our region."

"Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams are vital to our community's safety and security," Castor said. "We need to preserve the investment that our state and nation have made in these teams so that Florida, as one of the largest, most populous states in the country, is prepared for evolving security threats and contingencies."

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