March 9, 2012

Judge Robert A. Collier, Jr.
N.C. Board of Transportation
Post Office Box 346
Statesville, NC 28687

Dear Judge Collier:

I would like to express my disappointment and dismay about the Board of Transportation decision not to rename the Smoky Park Bridge in Asheville in honor of fire Capt. Jeff Bowen, who lost his life responding to a fire last July.

Like all of North Carolina’s brave fire and rescue personnel, Capt. Bowen showed a commitment to, and willingness to sacrifice for, the safety of his community. Ultimately, he gave his life fighting to protect the people of Asheville.

As State Fire Marshal, I personally advocated for this recognition. My proposal to honor Capt. Bowen gained ready support from Bowen’s family, the Asheville City Council, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners and firefighters across the state.

It’s been brought to my attention that it is the Board of Transportation’s practice not to name state bridges or roads after firefighters who have died in the line of duty. However, law enforcement officers who give their lives on the job are eligible for the honor.

This sends the troublesome message to our firefighters, their families and the public that the work of our fire and rescue personnel is somehow less important than the work of other public servants. I strongly believe that firefighters are deserving of our highest respect, as they are among our public servants who intentionally put themselves in harm’s way for the sake of others.

I implore you and the Board of Transportation to take action to give Capt. Jeff Bowen the recognition that his fellow firefighters, his community and the Office of State Fire Marshal feel he deserves, and rename the Smoky Park Bridge in his honor.

Sincerely,

Wayne Goodwin
North Carolina Insurance Commissioner
State Fire Marshal
CC: Secretary Gene Conti, N.C. Department of Transportation
Paul Miller, NCSFA Executive Director