

WASHINGTON - Reps. Lee Terry of Nebraska and Mark Kennedy of Minnesota are getting an early jump on the next battle over local drug-fighting grants.

The two Republicans and 81 other representatives from both sides of the aisle sent a letter Friday to U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.

They urged Gonzales to include in his 2008 budget significant funding for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program.

Local law enforcement officials have described the grant program as an important drug-fighting tool. Many Midwest agencies have used the funding to combat methamphetamine.

"Not only do we urge you to drop the short-sighted efforts of past years to eliminate this program," they wrote in the letter, "we ask that you seek a robust funding level that reflects the serious drug and gang problem in communities across the country."

President Bush's administration has sought in previous years to cut the program, saying the grants haven't shown an impact on crime. Critics also say the grants duplicate other efforts and lack accountability.

In an interview, Terry said local authorities need help to rid communities of meth.

He said he hopes the administration decides to support the program but that history does not bode well for its survival.

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