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Schauer pushes for food safety support

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Rep. Mark Schauer is putting pressure on the White House to guarantee long-term funding for food safety programs like the International Food Protection Training Institute in Battle Creek.

In a letter sent to White House Budget Director Peter Orszag, Schauer, D-Bedford Township, asked for "the fullest possible funding" for programs that train food inspectors contracted by the federal Food and Drug Administration.

Speaking in Battle Creek on Monday, Schauer again said the International Food Protection Training Institute was his top district priority.

"I'm bullish on this project because of the obvious reason of food protection (and) consumer protection," Schauer said during an event at Western Michigan University's Kendall Center in downtown Battle Creek where the food institute is located.

Food protection "is a global concern," Schauer said. "It's a concern of trade, which is not going to stop, by the way. Nor should it. But one of the things we need to take into account is keeping our people safe."

Congress in October approved Schauer's request for a single \$1 million payment to the institute.

Schauer said he was seeing positive signs that the White House supported the budget request that would help the institute expand programming.

President Barack Obama's 2011 federal budget is set to be released Feb. 1, a spokesman for the Office of Management and Budget said Monday.

While no exact dollar amount was given in Schauer's letter, the institute's Stephen Benoit said the ongoing federal support would need to be substantially more than \$1 million annually.

The institute has helped train around 300 food inspectors from around the county since opening in July, Benoit said, and the institute's goal is to train 1,000 people this year.

With secured government support, Benoit said, the institute could train up to 3,000 people a year in downtown Battle Creek and help thousands more through distance learning programs.

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