

**US House of Transportation Committee
Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee
Cruise Ship Passenger Safety
September 19, 2007
Statement of Jeff Morgan
On Behalf Of
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Atlanta, Georgia**

Chairman Cummings and Distinguished Members of the Committee, my name is Carolyn Coarsey and I am co-founder of the Family Assistance Foundation. My doctoral degree is interdisciplinary, combining psychology and education with a specialty in training employees on how to manage trauma in the workplace.

I have come before you today to tell you about my work with the cruise industry.

In 1985, my fiancé, a former airline executive died on board Delta Air Lines Flight 191, a crash in which 137 people perished. I knew, based on my own experience as an employee, that there were people inside the company who wanted to help us, but they simply did not know how.

At that time I decided to enter graduate school in order to study the problem of how a company could prepare employees to respond to the public at the time of a disaster. I now understood the problem not only from the employee's perspective, but from the family's perspective as well. The Civil Aeromedical Research Division of the FAA (CAMI) sponsored my studies at the University of New Mexico. My doctoral dissertation, published in 1992 clearly showed a difference in how passengers turned out when they were met by employees who handled them with concern, and empathy, as well as offering them support. Survivors who felt that the company had done everything possible to help them following fatal crashes had significantly less symptoms of five psychological disorders most often associated with trauma. That information formed the basis of the work that I do today.

In 2000, a former airline executive and I co-founded the Family Assistance Foundation for the purpose of helping organizations provide a higher level of response to survivors during tragedies. The purpose of the Foundation is to provide education, training, and organized mutual aid at the time of a tragedy. The cornerstone of the Foundation is to promote open dialogue between survivors and employee helpers. We encourage family and passenger survivors to tell their stories in an educational format so that they can themselves train employees on what is needed by survivors during these vulnerable times.

In 2005 I began interviewing survivors of cruise line tragedies. Shortly thereafter I became involved in developing training materials for the industry. I also began conducting training programs based on interviews that I was conducting with survivors. These interviews included family members of persons who had gone missing overboard, family members of deceased, and guests who had become involved in a tragedy while on a cruise ship.

I have seen a very aggressive response by the cruise line industry to the problem of empowering employees to assist survivors by offering many different training programs using these video tapes and written testimony. I have personally provided awareness education to more than 4,000 employees in the cruise line industry. I have trained cruise line executives, Care Teams, telephone responders, employees who will notify next-of-kin of guests who experience tragedy while on a ship, security personnel, safety officers, Captains and other on-board staff. The goal is provide some level of awareness to every employee who might interface with a survivor during a crisis.

In addition to the cruise industry's commitment to crew training, that includes guest support on-board and shoreside to assist passenger, they have also entered into an agreement with the FBI and USCG that clarifies reporting procedures for all serious violations of U.S. law to have occurred aboard cruise ships. Heightened security measures are standard for the maritime industry today and cruise line passengers go through screening procedures similar to those found at U.S. airports including the use of metal detectors, baggage scanning devices, and biometric verification machines.

In addition to the training, earlier this year at the Foundation's annual Symposium, we featured two panels on this subject. The first panel involved family members and guests who had survived cruise line tragedies prior to this robust training being offered by the industry. The second panel involved survivors of tragedies following the new programs. We saw a significant difference. Survivors who were empowered by trained employees and offered every form of assistance possible were still healing from the losses of loved-ones, but they did not have to cope with anger and hostility. The second group expressed gratitude as they felt validated and supported by the representatives of the cruise line. They knew that everything possible had been done to help them during the tragedy by the people who had the most power to help them while they were most dependent and vulnerable.

And I know that the industry is listening and learning from survivors. I personally facilitated a meeting in August of this year where industry officials met and listened to survivors. Most of what was heard was from survivors who were very upset as their experiences occurred before the industry began its educational efforts. Despite the unpleasantness of the experience, the cruise line representatives listened and did not attempt to defend their actions. They have learned that these expressions are part of the healing process and that providing survivors with the opportunity to speak their truth will play a major role in their healing.

True change begins when companies empower the employees to empower survivors during the tragedy, when they are most helpless. And this can only be done through training and education of employees. In this evolution of compassion consciousness which we are experiencing today, I have never seen an industry take a more proactive approach to changing how its workforce responds to trauma in the workplace.

I regret that I could not be with you today, but I appreciate your allowing me to provide you with this information.

At the Foundation, our interviews continue to show that when employees are empowered to help survivors, they have a tremendous opportunity to influence how survivors heal. These interviews form the basis of all training programs offered by the Foundation as we believe the true experts on the subject of how best to assist survivors are the survivors themselves.