New Senate Bill Introduced to Improve Safety at Sea

International Cruise Victims is pleased that Sen. Blumenthal and Sen. Markey, both members of the Senate Commerce Committee, have introduced new legislation known as S.1673 which is referred to as the Cruise Passenger Protection Act of 2015 (CPPA). Over the past several months ICV has been working closely with the sponsors of this legislation which sets new standards for protection and improved safety measures for cruise lines to follow.

“We want to thank International Cruise Victims for their tireless courage and decade of work to make sure victims aboard cruises have a voice. For the more than 23 million Americans who take cruises each year, critical life-saving technology—as well as long overdue measures to protect cruise passengers who become victims of crime or require medical attention in international waters—cannot be further delayed. With serious health and safety incidents continuing to occur, passengers aboard these floating cities need and deserve need basic protections. Federal action is needed now,” Blumenthal and Markey said.

The Cruise Passenger Protection Act of 2015 would:

- Require vessels to integrate technology that can be used for capturing images of passengers AND detecting passengers who have fallen overboard, to the extent that such technology is available;
- Improve medical standards aboard cruise ships.
- Require vessels to be staffed with an appropriate number of sea marshals, who have been certified by, and are operating under the jurisdiction of, the United States Coast Guard.
- Establish the Department of Transportation (DOT) as the lead federal agency for consumer protection for cruise ship passengers, similar to the role the Department has in aviation consumer protection;
Give consumers a clear upfront summary of the restrictive terms and conditions in cruise contracts. The Secretary of Transportation would develop standards for the cruise lines to provide prospective passengers with a short summary of the key terms in the contract. Consumers would be able to read a plain language summary of the key rights and limitations that passengers have during their cruise so they are fully aware of what rights they have, and don't have, before they book their tickets.

Establish a consumer complaints toll-free hotline telephone number, give the DOT the authority to investigate complaints, and create an Advisory Committee for Passenger Vessel Consumer Protection, which would be charged with evaluating current consumer protections and generating recommendations for improvements;

Require the reporting of crimes against minors to the list of currently reported crime statistics.

Address crimes on cruise ships by strengthening video surveillance requirements in public areas, and setting requirements for the amount of time cruises lines must retain videos;

Establish a victim advocate to be the primary point of contact in assisting victims, including helping the victim to understand their rights in international waters, get access to appropriate law enforcement and consulate services, and have access to necessary victim support services.

The issue of crime at sea and the need for increased protection is apparent as discussed in an article in the July issue of Security Magazine. While the cruise industry continues to indicate that they are committed to making improvements, there is no question that the industry will do everything possible to defeat the common sense measures set by this legislation.

The much needed CPPA legislation is poised to set a new standard for not only the United States but for the world. For more information on this new action and for ways in which you can help see that it is passed, please contact us at www.internationalcruisevictims.org or by phone using the contact information below.

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