

SAFETY

Florida HB 775 - May 26, 1999 Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

FAMILIES OF NATIONAL AIR SAFETY GROUP, TWA FLIGHT 800 CRASH VICTIMS URGE GOVERNOR TO VETO TORT REFORM BILL

May 26, 1999 - 11:30 AM

Tallahassee, Florida - Florida Press Center

It was almost midnight, and Janice Watson had fallen asleep watching television when she heard the news anchor say, "...no survivors" and awoke to see the flaming wreckage of a jetliner.

TWA flight 800 had just crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Long Island, killing all 230 passengers and crewmembers on board. Watson's 32-year old daughter Jill, an award-winning architect traveling to Paris, France, was on the 1996 flight.

Watson, now a National Air Disaster Alliance Board Member, will join the families of other TWA flight 800 victims along with legal experts and a nationally recognized expert on aircraft safety at a press conference protesting the "Boeing Exemption," a dangerous provision in the 1999 Tort Reform bill.

The protestors will urge Governor Jeb Bush to veto HB 775, which includes a provision written by a Boeing lobbyist banning lawsuits against manufacturers of aircraft more than 20 years old-or one-third of the nation's airliners.

"This is terrible legislation," said Gail Dunham, President of NADA, a Washington-based organization that presses for higher safety standards in the airline industry. "Governor Bush should veto it."

NADA is the nation's largest grassroots advocacy group working for aviation safety. The organization opposes the "Boeing Exemption," because it discourages aircraft manufactures from correcting dangerous design flaws by making it more profitable for them to wait and see whether the defect is detected within the 20-year period rather than spend millions of dollars fixing it.

The "Boeing Exemption" is part of a tort reform package that was passed during the 1999 Florida Legislative session and includes many other provisions that severely compromise the legal protections of Florida's families.

Governor Bush has said he would sign tort reform legislation, but the "Boeing Exemption" was not part of the original package and was drafted and added to the bill in the final days of the session.

Throughout the Legislative process, Governor Bush has met with corporate leaders to discuss the provisions of the tort reform bill, but despite written requests and repeated calls, he has yet to meet with victims, like Angel Palank, whose husband died in the 1991 Amtrak Silver Star Derailment.

Watson will be joined by Palank, along with Aurelie Becker, whose 19-year old daughter died in the TWA flight 800 crash, and Brenda Molnar, whose brother was killed in the 1994 US Air flight 427 disaster in Aliquippa PA. Nationally recognized aircraft wiring expert Edward Block will discuss wiring problems in aging Boeing aircraft and Miami attorney Joel S. Perwin who specializes in aircraft litigation, will discuss the legal ramifications of the bill.

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