

Statement of Kimberly A. Ware
United States Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation

Hearing July 23, 2014 – The Cruise Passenger Protection Act: Improving
Consumer Protections for Cruise Passengers

My name is Kim Ware. I am from Houston, Texas. I am the mother of five children and have three grandchildren. For the last six years, I have worked as a Health Care Recruiter.

My family and I have cruised many times. We love cruising and I, naively, had never given a thought to the possible dangers on board a cruise ship.

Being weary of the cold in February of 2013, my fiancé and I, booked a last minute cruise on the Carnival Triumph to enjoy some sun in Mexico. For the first two days of the trip everything went as planned. As we went to bed on the second day, we had no idea of what was to come. The passengers of the Carnival Triumph would be adrift at sea for four days living in horrendous conditions.

In the early morning hours of our third day at sea, we were awakened by an emergency announcement that sounded ominous. My fiancé quickly jumped up and went onto our balcony where he saw a great amount of smoke coming from the back of the ship. We immediately knew it was a fire.

Fear overcame me immediately, as during our muster drill, the crew had repeated over and over that fire was the gravest danger while at sea.

Shortly thereafter, the cruise director informed us that there was a “situation” in the engine room.

There was confusion among the passengers as to whether to go to the muster stations or not.

Several hours later our worst fears were confirmed. There had been a fire. It was out, but we were dead in the water. No power.

Eventually, the giant ship began to list. As you can imagine, this caused a great deal of fear among the passengers that the ship was going to capsize.

It was soon very clear that Carnival Cruise Lines had no plan in place for such a disaster. They were essentially winging it.

Conditions aboard the ship began to decay quickly. There was no electricity. We had water intermittently. We were informed that the sewage system no longer operated. All passengers were given red bio bags to use instead of the toilets. As passengers understandably did not want to use the bags, all public toilets on board the ship were quickly filled to the top with human waste. The sewer system quickly backed up and came out of the shower drains. And later, red bio bags lined the halls filled with feces. The stench was terrible and sanitation aboard the ship was nonexistent.

I was one of the very fortunate passengers who had a balcony cabin. The unlucky passengers who had booked inside cabins had no access to fresh air or sunlight. These passengers were forced to move their families to mattresses in the hallways on upper decks, or onto the lounge chairs on the pool deck where sheets were quickly raised as protection from the sun. A tent city was born. These passengers suffered the worst hardships. It was very disconcerting to see the elderly and young children in these circumstances. I couldn't help but wonder if the elderly had enough medicine with them. Had the parents of the babies packed enough diapers?

The crew was doing its best to provide us with meals, however, passengers waited hours in line for food.

Hoarding food became a problem as people were concerned that food would run out. I witnessed many heated arguments among passengers over food hoarding. The buffet did not look clean and people who had not bathed in days were handling serving utensils and food.

With the unsanitary conditions of the food service and the sewage problem, it is a miracle that a massive viral outbreak did not occur. I was constantly in fear of becoming sick in these conditions. We tried to stay out of the public areas as much as possible.

In truth, the entire ship had quickly become a refugee camp. I was very concerned that violence was going to erupt as passengers struggled with the living conditions. There seemed to be no security at all. At night, the ship became very, very dark and I never saw any type of security patrolling the ship.

As time slowly dragged on, the plans to get us back to shore kept changing. First, we would go to Progresso and be flown out. Then, the plan was for tugs to take us back to Houston. The final decision was that tugs would pull us into Mobile, Alabama. This decision was made with no thought to the passengers on board. Going to Mobile caused the passengers to endure the miserable conditions aboard the Triumph for an extra 24 hours. With no way to communicate with my family and days adrift at sea, I felt as though the cruise would never end. I finally broke down and cried.

Upon return home, the only communication I received from Carnival was a letter with a \$500.00 check and a refund voucher towards a future cruise. This seemed to me inadequate for the danger I was put in aboard the Triumph.

After being home awhile, I realized that I had put my trust in the Cruise Industry with no knowledge of what would happen in the event of a real emergency situation. I now know that Carnival sent the Triumph out with only four of the six generators working and with knowledge of a potential fire hazard in the fuel lines. I wish I had known these things prior to setting sail.

I feel that the Cruise ship industry has a duty to provide not only a great vacation for passengers, but to insure their safety at all costs and to impart the utmost in care when an emergency occurs. Information should be made public of problems occurring on cruise ships so that future passengers can make educated decisions on which lines to travel. Further, passengers should have the right to pursue compensation for any wrong doing on the cruise industry's part.

Cruising is a wonderful way for families to vacation together. However, cruising needs to be made safer for all U.S. citizens. My hope is that Congress will pass legislation to insure that the cruise industry abides by strict standards for passenger safety so that a future disaster of even greater magnitude aboard a cruise ship can be avoided.

Thank you for your time.