



NEWS | SPORTS | BUSINESS | ENTERTAINMENT | LIFE | TRAVEL | BLOGS | JOBS | REAL ESTATE | CARS | SHOPPING | HOME | MOBILE | TEXT MSG



Comments

Recommend

Search

advanced search | archives



Web Search by YAHOO!

Bus crash victims speak at the Capitol

They're pushing for stricter federal safety regulations

By BENNETT ROTH Copyright 2008 Houston Chronicle Washington Bureau
Sept. 19, 2008, 7:56AM



SUSAN WALSH ASSOCIATED PRESS

Devin Martindale, of Beaumont, spoke Thursday in Washington to push for safety upgrades on buses. Martindale was on the West Brook High School soccer team and lost her arm during a 2006 bus crash.

WASHINGTON — Hurricane Ike flooded her Houston home and caved in its ceiling. But Yen-Chi Le left one disaster and flew to the nation's capital to lobby for a law to prevent another tragedy: a bus crash like the one that killed her mother and 16 others in North Texas last month.

Le on Thursday joined seven other members of Houston's Vietnamese community to attend a Senate hearing on legislation intended to strengthen bus safety regulations. The proposal included requirements for seat belts, fire extinguishers, stronger roofs and more driver training.

"It is time now to act," said Le, a doctoral fellow at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston.

Standing near Le at the news conference before the hearing was Thanh Dinh Hoang, a 21-year-old student whose forehead and hip were badly injured when the bus rolled on its side while traveling on U.S. 75 in Sherman, north of Dallas.

Even though he is afraid to fly, Hoang, who speaks little English, was determined to go to Washington to make sure that the bus safety bill passes, according to those who traveled with him.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, has been pushing the measure. Despite resistance from the bus industry, Hutchison said, the improvements that her bill would mandate, especially seat belts, were sensible and already required in Europe and Australia.

Share

Print

Email

"You can't tell me that putting seat belts on a bus are too costly," Hutchison said before the hearing. "We are not asking for business-breaking safety enhancements."

Agencies speak up

At the hearing of a Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee, representatives from federal transportation safety agencies supported the broad outlines of the legislation, saying the Bush administration was moving ahead with implementing some of its provisions.

"Certainly more needs to be done in terms of oversight," said Mark Rosenker, acting chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board. He said his agency supports improving safety standards, including barring cell phone use by drivers and strengthening motor coach roofs.

John Hill, the administrator for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, noted that his agency had stepped up its inspections of buses. The driver in the Sherman crash had been cited for numerous deficiencies, he said.

David Kelly, the acting administrator of the National Highway Safety Administration, said the agency found in tests in December that injuries were more likely to be prevented when seat belts are used.

But Peter Pantuso, the president of the American Bus Association, an industry group, said more testing should be done before seat belts are required. The industry, he said, could not afford them.

"One cannot rush safety research, and one must look at all the evidence," Pantuso said. "We are an industry composed of small businesses, and the imposition of a seat belt mandate for every bus will be a heavy one. It will be impossible to fulfill without federal funds."

Families cry out

Emotional testimony came from those related to crash victims, including Stephen Foreman, whose daughter, Allison, was hospitalized after the bus carrying her and her West Brook High School teammates crashed in Devers in 2006.

"My message to parents is: These buses are unsafe, and we put our children on them over and over again," Foreman said. "As parents, we have got to stop this."

Melanie Brown, whose daughter, Ashley, was killed in the crash, said she was proud that Texas passed a law requiring all school buses to have seat belts and hoped the federal government would follow for all motor coaches. "We can no longer express concern and do nothing," Brown said.

Kyle Pendergast contributed to this article.

bennett.roth@chron.com



Get Houston Chronicle home delivery for only \$3 a week. Save 52%!

Comments

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's terms and conditions of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of the Houston Chronicle. Readers whose comments violate the terms of use may have their comments removed or all of their content blocked from viewing by other users without notification.

You must be logged in to comment. Login | Sign up



Most recent comments

- Quane... suspect knew what happened
- ... body found on Pelican Island
- ... at Maine restaurant
- One killed in... on Southwest Freeway
- League... 19, accused of killing
- As bail... House do-over, few
- ... take aim at running mates
- ... expectations may have helped
- ... makes moving easy(147)
- ... customers grow impatient as

Related stories