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Victims Push For Tougher Bus Restrictions

By Carl Willis

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HOUSTON – Donning white headbands as a symbol of their grief, relatives of those killed in a bus accident near Sherman filed into the Leland Federal Building in downtown Houston Saturday to call for new laws to improve bus safety, KPRC Local 2 reported.

Peter Pham was among those demanding change. He lost his aunt and grandmother in the wreck. He said he stood with fellow members of the Vietnamese community for one reason.

"For the safety of the people," Pham said. "We can turn our tears from the past two weeks into hope for the future."

Pham and many others said they faced hardship after the crash that killed 17 members of a Vietnamese Catholic group traveling to Missouri.

"A lot of families, they do not have any insurance. They do not have any coverage," said Al Hoang, of the Vietnamese Community of Houston. "They need to have some funds to help them."

That's one of the reasons that U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee authored legislation that would provide criminal penalties, fines, and jail time for negligent actions by bus drivers and company owners.

"This community has suffered enough," Jackson Lee said. "To be able to tell them that there are no laws in place that would give them relief is a double tragedy."

Reckless and negligent actions would include driving with retread tires on the front axle, failure to test drivers regularly, driving with excessive speed, and using a driver with repetitive driving violations.

The problem was hammered home even more after two separate accidents this week. A bus from the Transportes Los Nortenos caught fire on a trip to Columbus, Ohio. Another bus from that company crashed into a building when the brakes failed.

"So, you can see that bus crashes, interstate bus crashes are now becoming the norm and people are losing their lives," Jackson Lee said.

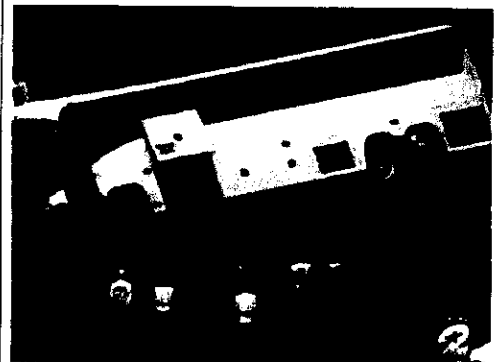
The congresswoman will also call for the use of seatbelts on charter buses.

Inspectors working for the victims' attorney said that might have saved Pham's relatives and many others.

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