U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Cruise Ship Security Practices and Procedures

Statement of

Vicky Rey
Vice President of Reservations Administration
Carnival Cruise Lines

September 19, 2007

Carnival Cruise Lines
3655 N.W. 87th Avenue
Miami, Florida 33178
(305) 599 -2600

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Chairman Cummings and Members of the Committee, my name is Vicky Rey. I am Vice President of Reservations Administration for Carnival Cruise Lines and the lead executive for the Carnival CareTeam.

Thank you for allowing me to participate this morning. We value your concern over the level of care that is given to guests and families when they unexpectedly find their vacations disrupted by an unexpected and unfortunate event. We share your concern and appreciate the opportunity to inform you of what Carnival does to take care of our guests when this occurs.

This is my first Congressional hearing and I am honored to here representing Carnival and the 500 members of our CareTeam.

During the past 26 years, I have held various passenger traffic management positions and have served in my present capacity for 17 years. I have led the CareTeam since its inception in 1999.

The CareTeam was originally organized to better handle critical incidents of mass guest displacement, primarily caused from a cancellation or alteration of a cruise as a result of mechanical or weather related factors. It has evolved into a team of well-trained individuals who respond on a regular basis to incidents involving medical or bereavement debarks or some other type of unexpected tragedy.

Our mission is to provide compassionate care and practical support to guests who find themselves in a time of significant stress or crisis. Our goal is to provide them with an environment where they can begin the healing process while they complete their business with us and move on with their lives.

As a corporation, we have learned that we have great power to help individuals succeed in their ability to transcend a tragedy by the care and compassion that we show them in the aftermath of a crisis. We have made a conscious effort to provide this kind of compassionate care not only because it is the right thing to do, but because we feel it is a privilege to help someone who may find him or herself facing a life altering event while vacationing with us.

Our CareTeam training program is on going, aggressive and comprehensive. Since last summer, we have trained 1470 employees over the course of 368 hours. This includes our large core group of Family Escorts and Support Services personnel, most of the shore side management, our Captains, Staff Captains, Chief Engineers, Hotel Directors, Chief Pursers and Chief Security Officers.

Furthermore, several hundred of our call center employees were trained on how to empathically communicate with affected guests or relatives who may be reaching us telephonically. An additional group received training on Next of Kin notification skills in the event we needed to inform relatives of a critical event. Finally, we have begun the process of training port agents and ground services personnel who often act as an extension of us when time and distance are factors.

An additional 80 training hours are planned for the balance of this year, bringing our total number of staff trained to 1760. Our goal remains to partner with other lines in expanding awareness and training to all of our crew and our vast network of port agents.

Our training is based on core CareTeam principles that identify the basic needs of an individual when they are in the acute phase of trauma – usually the first 72 hours after a critical event. Research has indicated that despite our personal and cultural differences, at the onset of trauma, we all have very similar needs when we grieve or hurt. It is what makes us human that binds us together. We have learned that sharing of sorrow makes for a very powerful bond and that our own personal losses and experiences make us well equipped to be able to help others that may be hurting in the same way. In every single case where we have provided assistance, our team members have returned moved and enriched by the experience.

Since May of last year, our CareTeam has assisted 163 families. The majority of these involved medical emergencies. During this period Carnival served 4.7 million guests.

When our CareTeam is activated, we travel to different destinations, wherever we are needed, to assist in providing emotional support, basic needs like clothing and food, connections to loved ones, lodging and transportation arrangements. In general, they run interference and provide guidance when other's coping mechanisms may be compromised. And, in the end, we help our guests return home to their loved ones.

We have instituted a formal notification process that is initiated on the ship to our shore side CareTeam core group. In all cases, an assessment is made as to what kind of support services will be needed. Depending on the circumstances, assistance and support can either be provided telephonically or in person by means of deploying CareTeam Family Escorts. In numerous instances, we have ship board personnel serve as family escorts until shore side staff arrives.

Lastly, I want to share with you that we are passionate about our level of commitment to this program and want to do everything possible to continue increasing awareness not only in our own company but within the industry as well. This year, we have partnered with the Family Assistance Foundation and just last May, were co-sponsors of their annual two day symposium that brought together survivors and members of the industry in a forum that encouraged education and understanding. The Foundation is an independent, Atlanta based non-profit corporation that supports businesses and victims of emergencies and disasters in an educational environment to bring about awareness and healing. In July, we participated in a CLIA hosted meeting where we met once again with survivors and members of the industry in order to learn from their experiences. Carnival is an active participant in CLIA's working group with families and with CLIA's Guest Assistance committee to determine industry best practices.

I am extremely proud of Carnival's CareTeam and the progress we have made as an industry in this regard. Let me assure you that we are firmly dedicated to continuing to do the right thing.

Thank you.