

**Statement of Mary Fetchet,
Founding Director and President, Voices of September 11th
Mother of 24 year-old, Bradley James Fetchet
who perished in World Trade Center on September 11, 2001
before the
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet of the
Committee on Energy and Commerce,
“Status of the Digital Television Transition”
Wednesday, March 28, 2007**

Good morning, Chairman Markey, Congressman Upton, and distinguished members of this committee, I am honored to be here today to testify on behalf of the 9/11 family members.

My name is Mary Fetchet. I am the Founding Director and President of Voices of September 11th, a 9/11 family organization whose membership includes over six thousand individuals worldwide. As you may know, my husband and I suffered the ultimate loss as parents when our twenty-four year old son, Brad, was tragically killed in Tower Two of the World Trade Center. Like many Americans, my sense of security and my faith in our government's effectiveness was shattered on that horrific day. The past five years have been a painful education for me, grappling with the challenges presented by political maneuvering, congressional inertia, and powerful special interest lobbies, all the while struggling with my personal anguish and grief. But I am proud to report that due to the efforts of 9/11 family members, the 9/11 Commissioners and dedicated elected officials, some progress has been made in making our country safer.

However, I am shocked and frustrated by the slow progress that has been made concerning first responder communications. Imagine if you will, being told your loved one's death could have been prevented. Imagine, then, that the solution to this problem was identified a full five years earlier. And imagine further, that nearly six years later,

little has been done. As you know, this is not a hypothetical example at all. It is the unfortunate reality that exists today. I firmly believe my son Brad's death could have been prevented on September 11th, but communication breakdowns made it impossible for brave rescue workers to effectively perform their job of saving lives.

I would like to read briefly from the final report of the Public Safety Wireless Advisory Committee, issued nearly eleven years ago. The report identified the exact problems that to this day we have failed to correct. It is as meaningful today as it was then:

“No responsibility is more fundamental and reflective of the nation's values than that of its Public Safety agencies. The citizens' legitimate expectation is that when their life...is endangered, the government will respond.... The effectiveness of police officers, fire fighters, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, and other Public Safety officials is inextricably tied to communications capability. Today's communications environment, however, impedes meeting this responsibility.... The lack of sufficient, quality radio spectrum suitable for Public Safety use deters technological innovation, diminishes the responsiveness and effectiveness of Public Safety, and ultimately compromises the safety of the responding officers and of the very individuals seeking their help.”¹

I have spent more time in Washington the past five years than I ever could have imagined. I am aware of the challenges of coordinating the public and private sectors to address this issue, and the political infighting that must be overcome. I understand the

¹ Final Report of the Public Safety Wireless Advisory Committee to the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, (11 September 1996), 5 Sec. 1.1. Available at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/osmhome/pswac/PSWAC_AL.pdf>.

challenge of legislating, and the greater challenge of implementing. And I understand the influence of powerful special interests. But I am here now to say this: Careful consideration is important, testimony is valuable, but the time for debate is over. There is no more room for interpretation. You have legislated, and now you must implement. A concerted effort must be made to work in a bipartisan manner, and concrete deadlines must be adhered to. I implore you to make a promise to my family and the families like mine: We will not allow this problem to continue any longer.

It was my naïveté that allowed me to be successful in pushing for reforms here in Washington, and five years later, maybe I remain naïve. But I am baffled that a problem identified after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, confirmed in Oklahoma City, confirmed on 9/11, and confirmed during Hurricane Katrina has yet to be corrected. I can think of no other word than negligence.

Voices of September 11th remains committed to working towards the full implementation of the 9/11 Commission recommendations, especially in the area of preparedness and improved first responder communications. The Commission made a strong recommendation in their 2004 report, urging for the expedited and increased assignment of spectrum for public safety purposes.² Less than a year ago, Chairman Thomas Kean and Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton asked a committee of your colleagues, “Who can say

² Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (New York: W.W. Norton and Co.: 2004), 397.

that no disaster will strike before 2009? It's inexcusable that we still haven't gotten our rescue workers the tools they need to do their jobs."³

This sentiment resonates strongly with the American people, as well. In August 2006, Voices of September 11th conducted a national survey of over 2,000 individuals to measure their perceptions of preparedness. The results are sobering. Over two-thirds of respondents rate national preparedness as fair or poor. Local preparedness and home preparedness rate only slightly better.⁴

I am impressed by the distinguished panel of witnesses assembled here today, and I am encouraged by the commitment to reform made by the members of this distinguished committee. But I remain skeptical. I fear that another mother, another father, another sibling will suffer the same loss as my family. I fear not only for their loss, but for the torment and anger they will experience knowing that their loved one's death could have been prevented had these important reforms been implemented. Please – prove these fears wrong. We cannot afford to wait; cannot afford to jeopardize the lives of our first responders or the lives of those they are called upon to save. In the past, the federal government has neglected its fundamental responsibility to protect its citizens. Who will be held accountable when the next life is lost?

³ Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, 6 June 2006.

⁴ Sixty-nine percent of those surveyed rated U.S. preparedness as "fair" (38%) or "poor" (31%). Local community preparedness was rated as "fair" or "poor" by sixty-seven percent of respondents (35% and 32%, respectively). Home and personal preparedness was rated as "fair" or "poor" by sixty-five percent of respondents (37% and 28%, respectively). Full survey data and methodology is available at <<http://www.voicesofsept11.org/dev/surveys.php?idtocitems=107,127&pers=1>>.

I would like to close by playing the message my son Brad left me around 9:00 am on September 11th. (Play tape)

As you can see, Brad was unaware that his life was in jeopardy and followed the direction he was given to remain in his office – “that they were safe and secure”. Sadly, individuals trying to evacuate the building were sent back up to their offices. Fire fighters and first responders who rushed into the building to save lives were not able to communicate. As a result, over 600 innocent citizens that should have escaped died.

Let me close as I began. My husband and I suffered the ultimate loss as parents when our twenty-four year old son, Brad, was tragically killed in Tower Two of the World Trade Center. Like many Americans, my sense of security and my faith in our government’s effectiveness was shattered on that horrific day. Today, I am hopeful that with your support, our brave first responders will be better equipped to respond and minimize the loss of life in the event of another catastrophic emergency, whether a terrorist attack or natural disaster. We all have an obligation, both public and private sectors, to work together in a bi-partisan fashion to ensure this transition. Appropriate funds must be dedicated with vigilant oversight to ensure we’re spending limited homeland security dollars wisely. As President of Voices of September 11th, I make a personal commitment to support your efforts in implementing these important reforms and to assist you in educating the general public as you move forward with the spectrum conversion. I sincerely thank you for your time and look forward to answering any questions you may have.