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Common Voices Receive Senator Paul S. Sarbanes Fire Safety Leadership Award at Annual CFSI Dinner in Washington, DC

Washington DC – The Congressional Fire Services Institute and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation awarded Common Voices the Senator Paul S. Sarbanes Fire Service Safety Leadership Award at the 21st Annual National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner on April 2, 2009 in Washington DC at the Washington Hilton. Named after retired-Senator Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland, a strong advocate of our nation's firefighters and rescue personnel during his 36-year career in Congress, the award recognizes organizations for their outstanding contributions to firefighter health and safety. Both State Farm Insurance and VFIS serve as the corporate supporters of the award program.

A survivor advocacy group, Common Voices consists of six women who have been sharing their stories of personal loss to advocate for fire sprinklers. These six advocates have many things in common, but the one that brings them together is the passion to prevent the loss of life to fire. Their lives were all changed when they lost a loved one to fire. Since the group was formed in 2007, they have visited Capitol Hill on many occasions to meet with members of Congress to advocate for the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act. They were also actively involved in the adoption of the ICC's Residential Code in 2008, providing compelling testimony at the ICC hearings. Most importantly, they travel across the country speaking to citizens and the fire service and local decision makers concerning the devastating effects of uncontrolled fire and how they can help others limit the chances to live out their stories.

“We honor the memory of all whom we have lost to fire and the burn survivors who work hard each and every day to educate regarding the important role that fire sprinklers play in our overall community fire protection plan,” says Vickie Pritchett, Facilitator of the Coalition. “We advocate for others to join us, to work with us, and we strive to prevent future tragedies. We are humbled to receive this award and we understand the significance that it represents and are honored to be recognized.”

CFSI President Bill Jenaway and NFFF Chairman Dennis Compton issued a joint statement recognizing the achievements of Common Voices. “Common Voices embraced the ideals of the Sarbanes Award and the Life Safety Initiatives established by the national fire organizations in 2004.”

Vice President Joe Biden was the keynote speaker at the annual dinner which brings over 2,000 fire service leaders from across the country together in our nation's Capitol.

Common Voices advocates are Amy Acton of Michigan, burn survivor and Executive Director of The Phoenix Society; Vina Drennan of New Jersey, lost her husband, Capt. John Drennan of FDNY in a fire; Justina Page of Texas is a burn survivor and lost her 22 month old son, Amos in a house fire. Donna Henson of Missouri, Bonnie Woodruff of North Carolina, and Gail Minger of Florida, all lost their sons in fires. For additional information, please visit the Common Voices Coalition website at www.fireadvocates.org.

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