



**TESTIMONY OF REP. MARY BONO
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY
HEARING ON H.R. 1759, THE MANAGING ARSON THROUGH CRIMINAL
HISTORY ACT
NOVEMBER 6, 2007**

Good afternoon Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Forbes and Members of the Subcommittee. I want to thank you for convening this hearing and allowing me the opportunity to testify today on the Managing Arson Through Criminal History or MATCH Act.

I am pleased to have been joined in this effort by my good friend and colleague from California, Representative Adam Schiff. I have appreciated his expertise and willingness to work with me to make improvements to the legislation.

Although we introduced the MATCH Act several months ago, the devastation of the recent catastrophic fires in California have called to the nation's attention the damage and destruction that fire can cause. The cause of these fires, which burned over half a million acres, are still under investigation and some are suspected to be the result of arson.

Through these recent events, we have all been reminded of the bravery of the men and women at the front lines of these powerful and all but uncontrollable fires. This issue is one that is near to the heart of my community. Just over a year ago, we lost five dedicated US Forest Service firefighters in the Esperanza fire, a blaze that has been attributed to arson.

One of the fallen fire fighters, Jason McKay called his girlfriend, Staci, shortly before his death to tell her that he loved her before going out and losing his life to save others.

Jason was planning to propose to Staci at Christmas. Now they will not have the opportunity for a future together, something that so many of us take for granted.

But Jason and Staci's story is not the only tale of tragedy due to arson- the devastation, pain and loss that result from arson are felt by all its victims. The Parilla family in Hawaii was forced to live in a tent on the ashes of their family home after their house and cars were randomly lit on fire. The Barnard family of Georgia relies on the community to ensure that their basic needs are met after their mobile home burned to the ground. The young children escaped only after a teenage daughter broke and crawled through jagged glass to help her family out.

I can share statistic after statistic about the damage caused by arson, the millions of dollars lost and grand totals of people affected. But what these numbers fail to convey are the stories of individuals. The hundreds of families in Southern California who will have nowhere to celebrate the holidays this year, the veteran who lost his war medals and mementos before he could share them with his grandchildren, the baby pictures, the refrigerator art, the family rocking chair- the things that no insurance policy could possibly replace and that no one else will ever quite understand.

It is our duty as Members of Congress to provide what tools and infrastructure we can to aid in both the prevention of this crime and speedy apprehension of those who chose to commit it. The MATCH Act, which I introduced earlier this year as H.R. 1759, creates a national arson registry. This registry combines the efforts of federal, local and state law enforcement officials to track criminal arsonists.

We have worked to ensure that this registry does not infringe on states' rights. The MATCH Act is not intended for youth, it is expressly targeted at adults and repeat offenders. States maintain their ability to treat juvenile offenders in the manner best suited to the needs of their states and localities.

Records kept in the proposed database have been an area in which I have paid particular attention, giving law enforcement the information they need. I have based some of this framework on the successful sex offender registry law. Additionally, our discussions with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives have indicated that this registry will serve an important function in tracking serial arsonists.

It is my sincere belief that the MATCH Act will make a meaningful difference in the way that we approach and deal with arson. I would like to thank the Fire Chiefs from California that have joined us today; I know that each of us will benefit from their insight and experience. I would like to give a special thanks to Chief Soqui who is actually responsible for the concept of a national arson registry. He is a resident of my district, and I am grateful for his willingness to participate in today's hearing and be a part of crafting this legislation.

In closing, I would like to make clear my commitment to work with Members from both sides of the aisle to ensure that we move forward a well crafted, workable piece of legislation. I have been heartened by the support that I have received from so many members of this Committee for this legislation; more than 15 Members of the Judiciary Committee are currently co-sponsors of the MATCH Act. I look forward to working with each of you as the legislative process moves forward. Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member for holding this hearing today.