

By Congressman David Price in Washington, DC

I am pleased to join Chapel Hill Fire Chief Dan Jones and other community leaders today to help launch this year's National Campus Fire Safety Awareness Month. I particularly want to welcome the students and others from my district in the Research Triangle region of North Carolina.

Those who have experienced the tragedy of a fatal campus fire, as the UNC Chapel Hill campus did in 1996, know how devastating it can be. That fire was a terrible personal loss for the friends and families of those students, and an enormous loss for the whole campus community as well. But it also reminded us of the need to be vigilant about prevention.

In the aftermath of the fire, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation to require that all fraternity and sorority houses install sprinkler systems by 2001. 26 of 32 houses complied, and the others were shut down. The law also required that residence halls be retrofitted with sprinkler systems by 2012. Today, all 29 residence halls on campus are equipped with smoke and fire detection systems with automatic alarms that are linked to the emergency response system. All have fire extinguishers, exit plans, and multiple exit routes; six halls have sprinkler systems.

Although we know equipping student housing with automatic sprinkler systems and interconnected smoke alarms can help save lives, the cost can be a barrier. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of the College Fire Prevention Act (H.R. 642), which would establish a major demonstration incentive program at the Department of Education to promote installation of fire sprinkler systems and other fire suppression and prevention technologies in dormitories.

We've also had some recent success in terms of requiring higher education institutions to file annual reports on fires and fire alarms on campus, thanks to my colleague, Rep. Bill Pascrell.

All of us share a common goal, and that is to raise the awareness of students, parents, and administrators about the importance of campus fire safety and the steps they can take to prevent loss of life due to fires. I am pleased to help kick off September as National Campus

Fire Safety Awareness Month, and I hope you will continue working to take this effort to all 50 states.