

My name is Debbie Butler and I am here to represent my family and specifically my sister, Peggy Autry, whose home was completely destroyed and her daughter critically injured during a house fire on Easter Sunday at 2609 Forest Lawn Drive.

We had just finished our Easter Sunday dinner as a family and disbanded with our tummys full and satisfaction of a happy family gathering never contemplating what was about to happen.

Within an hour from my leaving the dinner, the fire had completely ravished the house. Providence Fire Department was the first on the scene with a response time of approximately four minutes. Without their timely arrival, Rhonda Autry's life may have been lost. She was quickly tended and air lifted to Baptist Burn Center in Winston Salem where she was put in the Intensive Care Unit in critical condition. Several other fire departments responded but Providence was the first. After the flames were put down the firefighters made every effort to look for and save precious belongings that could not be replaced. All the while treating Peggy with dignity and respect to her feelings and loss. Providence firefighters have called every day since the fire to check on Peggy and Rhonda and to ask if there is anything that they can do to help. Last week they came by and removed items that were left in the home that may be salvaged and put them in a storage pod for Peggy. All of these actions not required but accomplished as if Peggy and her family were part of their family. Having a fire department located within minutes from the Forest Lawn side of Weddington allows response times wherein individuals and properties may survive. You can't put a price on these things. Weddington has always been a community of families. Closely tied by relationship or values. When one hurts they all hurt.

Businesses and services all considered as family members. This is one of the strongest features drawing people to our community. One of the virtues that create safety and security. I was born and raised here and have always felt secure. A feeling that is fleeting in today's society around most of the country.

Generally, we all go about our day to day business without ever thinking such an event could happen to us nor do we think about the services that are needed during a time like this or where they come from or how they are supported. It never dawns on us that tomorrow we may not even have a toothbrush to brush our teeth. As insignificant as that sounds, it is real. The reality of such devastation is a much larger picture with consequences much too great to comprehend.

Please take time to consider the consequences before you deny us the safety and security we deserve. Money is not the greatest issue on the list. Weddington is a community with a long history of family and community and now shines with new life and a higher tax base than ever before. To take the fire department out of our community would demean our importance in the area and make us weak compared to our counterparts. Growth doesn't mean casting aside what we have, rather, a more concerted effort to keep what is positive and improve upon it. Losing safety and security is not an improvement. It is with a great sense of gratitude to Providence Fire Department that I make this plea.