



# CITY OF HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

Steven E. Lohr  
Fire Chief

February 2, 2020

Mr. Johnie F. Roth, Jr, P.P.  
Chairperson, MSVFRA Legislative Committee  
17 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear ~~Chairperson Roth~~ Johnie,

On behalf of the Hagerstown Fire Department, I would like to record our opposition to proposed **HB0153: Public Safety - Maryland Building Performance Standards**. Please enter this letter as part of the record prior to the February 4th committee hearing. Regrettably, I am unable to attend the hearing but offer the following comments.

The building code and the various requirements that impact the safety of the public are essential mechanisms necessary to protect our citizens while they live, work and play in the structures where they expect to be safe. Moreover, these same citizens entrust our governments to guarantee their safety whenever possible.

Building codes and their companion National Fire codes are appropriately revised on regular cycles that are necessary to keep pace with changes to the built environment. By not keeping pace with these changes, we place the public at higher risks. As you know, the model codes are consensus based and therefore fairly vetted by subject matter experts from all venues.

Fire Departments across Maryland depend upon the most current codes to enact the best protection possible to deal with new building materials, height and area limitations, interior finishes, exiting, and of course, residential sprinkler requirements. We rely upon the larger codes process to provide state of the art safety assurances through these code changes.

For the nearly 50 years I have been a member of the MD fire service, I realize that smoke detectors are the first defense against fire, and that sprinklers in all occupancies are the best defense against fire. You need look no further than the jurisdictions that have had sprinkler requirements in place since the 1980's. Their life safety record is undeniable. As I am sure members are keenly aware, 85% of fire deaths occur in the home. Any legislation that will ultimately delay or defer the use of approved residential fire sprinklers in the home clearly places our citizens at far greater risk than necessary.

Please fully consider the true impacts of deferring current requirements when considering this bill. I urge you to reject the bill in the spirit of public safety.

Yours in service,

Steven E. Lohr  
Fire Chief