

HOUSE BILL 0823 - PUBLIC SAFETY – STATE FIRE MARSHAL – SPRINKLER SYSTEMS ENFORCEMENT
TESTIMONY OF

February 25, 2020



Mission Statement – “To protect lives and property from fire through the widespread acceptance of the fire sprinkler concept.”

Good afternoon Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is Terry Victor. I am a citizen of Carroll County, Maryland, the immediate past chairman of the Capital Region Fire Sprinkler Association, and Senior Manager of Industry Relations for Johnson Controls Fire Protection. I’m testifying today **in favor** of house bill 823.

This is a good bill! This bill is about enforcing a state law that protects citizens and firefighters. This bill makes logical sense because it assigns the responsibility to enforce fire protection laws to the entity tasked with state-wide fire protection, the Maryland State Fire Marshal.

While most counties within the state already had requirements for residential sprinkler systems, all remaining counties but one has complied with legislation passed in 2012 that requires every new home in the state be equipped with a fire sprinkler system. Allegany County has been ignoring this law and has allowed new homes to be built without this protection. Getting Allegany County to comply has been difficult because enforcement of the law currently resides with the Department of Labor. The law has nothing to do with labor, but has everything to do with fire protection and public safety from fire and therefore enforcing the law should fall under the duties of the State Fire Marshal, as this bill will allow.

It’s extremely important for the protection of the citizens of Maryland that all new homes in our state be built with a residential fire sprinkler system as is required by current law. Home fires are much more intense and fast growing than ever before. In the past when furniture was built with natural wood and fibers, fires grew slowly and residents had a chance to escape. In homes today furnishings are full of foam, particle board, and synthetic materials that ignite quickly, burn with intense heat, and emit toxic smoke. Residents have less than 3 minutes to escape before flashover occurs, which is the near-simultaneous ignition of most of the directly exposed combustible material in the room.

In addition, the firefighters that respond to a fire are at a higher risk of injury or death in new homes because lightweight structural members are replacing the solid wood members used in the past for floor joists. In most new homes being built today, the floor joists are made of a composite of wood chips glued together. When fire ignites these members, they burn very quickly and basically fall apart. In actual fire tests these structural members that support the floor above fail in less than 13 minutes. The average response time for firefighters to arrive on a fire scene in Allegany County is 11 minutes. By the time they are prepared to enter the building to search for occupants, the floor could fail, sending them in a raging inferno in the basement.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, otherwise known as FEMA, believes in residential sprinklers. When emergency housing is needed during a disaster, the temporary housing units brought in by FEMA are equipped with a residential fire sprinkler system. That’s how important these systems are.

In closing residential fire sprinkler systems are installed to save the lives of our citizens and our firefighters. Enforcement of the state law requiring them should come under the Office of the State Fire Marshal. This bill will correct the current issue with the non-compliant county and any future attempts for other counties or jurisdictions to ignore the law. I would ask the committee to give HB 823 a favorable report. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Terry L Victor, 3621 Carrollton Rd., Upperco, MD 21155