



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

March 1, 2024

TO: The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Marc Elrich
County Executive

RE: Senate Bill 689, *Fire Protection and Prevention - Residential Rental Property - Requirements (Melanie Nicholle Diaz Fire Safety Act)*

I'm writing to support the fire safety and tenant protections in Senate Bill 689 and to request amendments to delay by six months the implementation date of the smoke detectors under the bill. I strongly support Senate Bill 689 because the protections it would require could have helped slow the devastating fire last year at a Silver Spring high-rise apartment complex that displaced over 400 residents, led to the hospitalization of 20 people including firefighters responding to the incident, and caused the tragic death of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs.

Among other protections, Senate Bill 689 would require smoke detection equipment to be installed in each public corridor accessible by units in a residential high-rise building by July 1, 2024. Also beginning July 1, 2024, the owner of a residential rental high-rise building that is not protected by a complete automatic sprinkler system must post notice at all main building entrances and include in any lease agreement a conspicuous warning to residents that the building is not protected throughout by a complete automatic sprinkler system.

In 2019, the Maryland State Fire Marshal highlighted the dangers of living in high-rise buildings without sprinkler systems, which have been shown to reduce civilian fire deaths by up to 87%. However, under current State law, older buildings are not required to have these sprinkler systems in place. Montgomery County has more high-rise buildings without complete automatic sprinkler systems than any other jurisdiction in the State. Senate Bill 689 takes important steps to prevent further tragedies and is critical to the safety of Montgomery County residents and Marylanders across the State. I respectfully request a favorable report with the suggested amendment to move the smoke detector requirement date to January 1, 2025, on Senate Bill 689.

cc: Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee