

Chairman Marc Korman, Vice Committee Chair Regina Boyce, and Environment and Transportation Committee Members

House Office Building
6 Bladen Street Annapolis, MD. 21401
February 6, 2024

HB-502 Public Safety- Fire Dampers, Smoke Dampers, Combination Fire Smoke Dampers and Smoke Control Systems

I ask for a favorable vote on HB-502

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony on HB-502. My name is Joseph Pickens, I'm the Training Director for SMART Local 100. I represent 2,000 working Sheet Metal Journeypersons that live in Maryland. In addition, I'm a Certified TAB (Testing, Adjusting, Balancing) Commissioning Supervisor, Fire Life Safety Supervisor, and a Smoke Control Systems Supervisor. During my career I've witnessed hundreds of Fire Dampers, Smoke/Fire Dampers and Smoke Control Systems that do not operate correctly. I've found fire dampers installed sideways and upside down, I've found fire dampers with no access door. I've found fire dampers that have had drywall framing screwed to the outside of the damper and the screw located in the dampers track preventing the damper from closing. I've found fire dampers with 2x4's wedged in the damper where the linkage has broken under stress for many years. I've found smoke and fire dampers that don't open and close properly because of mechanical fatigue or the electrical power has been severed or turned off at the breaker panel. In addition, this has been the experience of many of my colleagues in the Testing, Balancing, and Commissioning field. There is data to back this claim up. A Fire Damper reliability study was done in 2021 by Dr. James Milke Ph.D., P.E. Professor and Chair of the Department of Fire Protection Engineering School at the University of Maryland. Study is being submitted for your review. The study concluded that 67.7% of all buildings had issues (repair, replacement or need of access) with the FLS dampers. Because there's such a prevalent problem with fire dampers and smoke fire dampers not working as designed there is a real need for the individual that not only installs but that will test fire dampers, smoke fire dampers and smoke-controlled systems to maintain a certification under ANSI (American National Standards Institute) in doing this work. We feel the best way to correct the prevalent problem is to ensure that the individuals doing the inspections be certified in the work they are performing. Additionally, that all fire dampers, smoke fire dampers and smoke-controlled systems be checked every four years.

As the Training Director of a program that represents almost 400 Maryland Apprentices, I can assure you that the training program we employ for Fire Life Safety is as robust as any in the Nation. Our apprentices and journeymen that take this training spend a minimum of 48 hours doing a combination of hands-on, augmented reality, and code training. When they have completed the training, they will then take a certification test that is approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). This training and certification puts our workers immediately amongst the top qualified candidates in the Nation as far as Fire Life Safety is concerned. I cannot imagine how this work would be done without this level of training. Often it is not done at all and this had led to catastrophic consequences.

Currently, sprinkler systems, Fire alarm systems, and fire extinguishers are tested periodically to guarantee that they work properly. Unfortunately, other components such as fire dampers, smoke dampers and smoke control systems are not clearly subject to inspection and testing requirements. By passing HB-769 it would ensure that in an event of a fire all occupants and fire fighters that were in or entering the building at the time of a fire would be in less harm and less likely to perish in a building fire.

Secondary and tertiary results of having ANSI certified technicians test the said dampers every four years may result in lower insurance costs and lower electrical costs. When an HVAC system operates with faulty dampers that are closed, partially closed or partial blocked the HVAC system fan uses more energy to overcome the unnecessary resistance in the duct system.

Once again, I ask you for a favorable vote on HB-502.

Respectfully,

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