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Legislative District 21
Prince George's and
Anne Arundel Counties

Government, Labor, and
Elections Committee

Chair

Local Government/Bi-County
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Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB153

Real Property – Residential Rental Apartments – Air Conditioning Requirements
February 5, 2026

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee.

For the record, my name is Mary Lehman, here in support of HB153 Real Property – Residential Rental Apartments – Air Conditioning Requirements.

HB153 states that rental units in newly constructed apartment buildings with four or more units must include air conditioning that can cool each unit to no greater than 80° Fahrenheit.

For Maryland's existing apartment buildings, HB153 states that air conditioning must be included only once a rental unit undergoes a renovation that includes the replacement or substantial upgrade of electrical systems or heating systems. This includes replacing a gas boiler, a water heater, or other substantial electrical work.

HB153 notably does NOT specify what type of air conditioning must be installed – that is left up to the property owner. Any combination of heat pumps, central air, or window units is acceptable under HB153, so long as the unit can be cooled to the 80° threshold. That threshold temperature is in current law in Prince George's and Montgomery counties, which together account for one-third of the state's population.

The air conditioning requirement applies between June 1 and September 30. The version of the bill before you today is the result of hard work and compromise with groups including the Maryland Multi-Housing Association and Apartment and Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington, who opposed the legislation in the past but are neutral on this year's version.

I am asking that you consider this bill not only in the context of housing and renters rights, but in the context of public health, disaster mitigation, and community resilience.

In 2016, The Maryland Department of Health, along with the University of Maryland School of Public Health, published the Maryland Climate and Health Profile Report. Evidence from the report, which was based on a decade of Maryland hospitalization data, indicated that exposure to extreme heat events is increasing the risk of hospitalization due to heart attacks and asthma. The report also found that even with current climate change mitigation efforts, extreme heat events will continue to become more common for the foreseeable future.

Since I brought this bill before the House last session, there has been a significant increase in heat-related hospital calls, emergency room and urgent care visits, and most notably and unfortunately, deaths. All the following statistics were pulled from the 2025 Maryland Department of Health Heat report:

- From 2024 to 2025 there was a jump from 1,255 emergency visits to 1,674 and a jump from 1,502 calls in 2024 to 1,674 in 2025. This increase is applicable to all demographics and most locations.
- There were 34 heat related deaths in the state last year, a statistically significant 26% increase from 2024.
- Increase in deaths were recorded across the state, even in the far reaches of Allegany, Frederick, and Washington counties.
- Heat is also indiscriminatory in age group. There were increases in hospital visits and deaths for 0–17-year-olds, 65-74-year-olds, and 75+. 2025 was the **first year since at least 2021 that we have seen kids dying** from heat related problems.
- Lastly, 53% of heat related deaths happened indoors (18 of the 34).

The 2025 report states that messaging about heat related illnesses and extreme heat events should be tailored around finding air-conditioned environments. This bill will bring those environments into Marylander’s homes. Marylanders should be able to go home to recover from the summer heat, not be scared that their home will be unsafe from increasingly dangerous heat conditions. To reiterate, 53% of these deaths were indoors. Indoor heat related deaths are completely unacceptable; HB153 aims to prevent these deaths moving forward.

During the process of constructing this bill, I spoke with Dr. Amir Sapkota, a contributor to the 2016 Report. He said that based on the current trajectory of climate change, communities need to adapt. He said that HB153 bill would increase community resilience and, I quote, “prevent many deaths.”

As an example of what can happen when a heat wave strikes a region that is ill-prepared for such conditions, I’d point you to the Pacific Northwest heat wave from the summer of 2021. It killed 200 people in total, 69 of whom were from Multnomah County, Oregon, which includes Portland. A study undertaken by the county dug into the data. It found that, at most, three of the individuals who died had air conditioning units that were on and in working order. In one case a portable air conditioning unit was found in use, but it was not able to keep up with the heat. The report found that lack of air conditioning was a key driver in mortality.

Two years ago, the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, along with my former committee, Environment and Transportation, passed the Tenant Safety Act of 2024. It was landmark legislation aimed at providing much needed support to tenants living in unsafe housing conditions. However, because state law has no mention of cooling requirements, or even an indoor temperature maximum for what can be considered habitable, legal action for these unsafe situations face an uphill battle unless cooling is explicitly mentioned in a tenant’s lease. This bill is a first step toward changing that.

I am confident that it will save lives, which is why I am here today urging you for a favorable report. Thank you.

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