

Marjorie Kreppel
8030 Woodmont Avenue
Bethesda, MD 20814

To the Members of the Committee Reviewing SB0624:

My name is Marjorie Kreppel and I write to you today as a strong and urgent supporter of SB0624, legislation that would establish critical fire safety requirements for short-term rental properties. I am submitting this letter as a witness in support of the bill.

I write not only as a concerned citizen, but as a friend of a family whose lives were shattered by a tragedy that this legislation could help prevent.

In the summer of 2023, my dear friend Alisa Wiener traveled with her husband Lew and their three children, Jillian, Lindsay, and Zach, to the Hamptons for a family vacation. They were staying in a short-term rental property. By all accounts, it was meant to be an ordinary, joyful family trip.

One night during their vacation, a fire broke out. It was later determined to have originated from an outdoor kitchen that the homeowner had constructed without going through any permitting process, meaning it was never inspected, never approved, and never confirmed to be safe. There were no working smoke detectors in the home.

The three children were sleeping upstairs. Zach managed to jump from a window and survive. Jillian and Lindsay did not make it out.

Alisa lost two of her daughters that night. She has since lost her husband Lew as well, who passed away last summer after a battle with cancer.

No family should ever endure this. And yet, this tragedy was entirely preventable.

Had there been working smoke detectors, the family would have had precious additional minutes to escape. Had the outdoor kitchen been subject to a permitting and inspection process, a dangerous installation might have been caught before it ever became a source of ignition. These are not extraordinary asks. These are baseline protections.

Here is a question I would invite this committee to sit with: **We require anyone who drives for Uber or Lyft to have a valid driver's license and insurance before they are permitted to carry a paying passenger. We hold them accountable to safety standards because passengers are trusting them with their lives. Why, then, do we not hold short-term rental property owners to equivalent standards when families are trusting them with their lives, and the lives of their children, while they sleep?**

Renting your home to paying guests is a commercial transaction. Guests have no way to inspect the wiring, no way to verify that smoke detectors work, no way to know whether that outdoor kitchen was built by a licensed contractor or assembled without a single permit. They are entirely dependent on the property owner and on us, as legislators and regulators, to set the floor.

SB0604 sets that floor, and I would ask this committee to consider the opportunity it also creates.

A requirement that short-term rental properties obtain and maintain a valid safety certificate before listing on any platform such as Airbnb, VRBO, or otherwise, would open the door to an entirely new category of small business in Maryland: independent short-term rental safety inspection companies. Not full property management firms, but focused, streamlined businesses whose sole purpose is to certify that a property meets baseline safety requirements: working smoke detectors, proper egress, safe installations, and other critical protections. These certificates would not be one-time transactions, they would require periodic renewal, creating ongoing, sustainable business activity.

This is a job creation opportunity. It is an entrepreneurial opportunity. And it is a consumer protection mechanism that costs the state very little to mandate but delivers enormous value to the families who book these properties in good faith, trusting that someone has verified they are safe.

Maryland can lead on this. We can be the model that other states follow.

I urge this committee to pass SB0604 without delay. Jillian and Lindsay Wiener deserved to come home from that vacation. So does every family that books a short-term rental tonight, and tomorrow night, and every night after that.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie Kreppel
301-651-0303