



Bill Title: House Bill 408, Public Utilities - Gas Service Regulator Safety (Flower Branch Act)

Committee: Economic Matters

Date: February 13, 2020

Position: Favorable

This testimony is offered on behalf of the Maryland Multi-Housing Association (MMHA). MMHA is a professional trade association established in 1996, whose members consist of owners and managers of more than 210,000 rental housing homes in over 958 apartment communities. Our members house over 538,000 residents of the State of Maryland. MMHA also represents over 250 associate member companies who supply goods and services to the multi-housing industry including towing companies.

Following the tragic events at Flower Branch Apartments in 2016, House Bill 408 seeks to ensure that such a calamity does not occur again. This legislation requires gas service newly installed at an occupied structure may have a gas service regulator installed only outside the structure and an existing interior gas service regulator to be relocated outside whenever a gas service line, meter, or regulator is replaced. HB 408 further mandates that an existing interior gas service regulator servicing a multifamily structure to be relocated outside on or before October 1, 2025. Any existing gas service regulator that is installed in the interior of an occupied structure shall be relocated to the outside of the structure whenever the gas service line, meter, or regulator is replaced. Further, on or before October 1, 2025, any existing interior gas service regulator that services a multifamily residential structure shall be relocated to the outside of the structure. The bill requires that a gas service regulator is installed away from roads, driveways, parking areas, or other locations exposed to vehicular traffic or other external forces that may damage the gas service regulator. If it is impractical to install a gas service regulator guards shall be installed to protect the gas service regulator from external forces that may damage the gas service regulator. Guards may consist of posts, bollards, railings, or any other safety structure that will prevent damage to the gas service regulator.

As was the case at Flower Branch Apartments, an explosion can occur due to the failure of a mercury service regulator, with an unconnected vent line, allowing natural gas into the meter room where it ignited. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) stated that the gas company was responsible for ensuring the vent line was connected. MMHA supports efforts to ensure multifamily housing is safe for all residents. Echoing the position of the NTSB that the public utility is responsible for gas service regulators which are typically placed “before the meter,” MMHA supports replacement of these devices by the public utility.

For the foregoing reasons, MMHA respectfully requests a **favorable report on House Bill 408.**

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