

Senate Bill 746 – Public Safety – State Fire Marshal – Sprinkler Systems Enforcement

Testimony of J. Dennis Gentzel, representing the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, February 25, 2020

Good afternoon Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairman Kagan and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. My name is Dennis Gentzel and I am here today representing the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. I am a member of the Pikesville Volunteer Fire Company in Baltimore County with over 30 years of service and over 55 years as a volunteer firefighter/EMT. I am a graduate of the University of Maryland with a B.S> Degree in Fire Protection and I am a Maryland Licensed Professional Engineer. I am retired from the Office of the State Fire Marshal of Maryland and the National Fire Academy in Emmittsburg, Maryland. During my last 4 years with the Office of the State Fire Marshal, I was the Chief Fire Protection Engineer. I have always considered sprinklers my “specialty.” I have well over 30 years of experience in Plan Review and Inspection of Sprinkler Systems. I was also on the Adjunct Faculty and taught sprinklers for 15 years at Catonsville Community College. I built a new home in 1988 and installed residential sprinklers in the new home. I still live in this home.

Residential sprinklers save lives. Not just of the occupants but also volunteer and career firefighters. It is important that all areas of the State consistently receive the same level of Code Enforcement when it comes to Sprinklers in One and Two Family Dwellings. Currently Sprinklers in One and Two Family Dwellings are not enforced at the same level across the State of Maryland.

Senate Bill 746 really makes sense to me. The Office of the State Fire Marshal has the highly trained staff in strategic locations around the State to do the Plan Review and Inspections of One and Two Family Residential Sprinkler Systems. It is difficult for me to believe that any other State Agency could provide this service.

Maryland is a leader around the country when it comes to fire protection both in structure firefighting and in Fire Prevention and Life Safety activities. It is time for the effective and consistent enforcement of One and Two Family Sprinkler requirements around the State of Maryland.

I respectfully request your support of House Bill 823 for all citizens of Maryland, all firefighters in Maryland and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. Thank you