

HOUSE BILL NUMBER 0823 - PUBLIC SAFETY – STATE FIRE MARSHAL
SPRINKLER SYSTEMS ENFORCEMENT

TESTIMONY OF

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Good afternoon Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee. I am John Denhardt, the Vice President of Engineering and Technical Services for the American Fire Sprinkler Association, I am a Professional Engineer registered in the State of Maryland and a lifelong resident of this great State. I am testifying today in favor of House Bill 823. I would like to thank Vice Chairman Stein for bringing this legislation to you today.

Since 2015, the State of Maryland has required residential fire sprinklers in all new residential occupancies. When this requirement was passed, there were numerous construction trade-offs allowed because fire sprinklers were installed. Thus, the residential building code assumes fire sprinkler protection is being provided. In my opinion, if fire sprinkler protection is not installed as required by the residential building code, the property being built is not safe for human occupancy and is a danger for responding fire departments.

The residential construction standards were relaxed because fire sprinklers were required. The residential building code does not give construction standards for a non-sprinklered residential building. Again, the building code assumes fire sprinklers are being installed. Lightweight construction materials, minimized fire ratings, and other trade-offs are allowed. Without fire sprinkler protection, these residential buildings are a danger to the occupants and the responding fire department personnel.

I am concerned that where the current fire sprinkler law is not being enforced, the local building code authority is not requiring additional construction features to minimize the lack of fire sprinkler protection. This is most likely because the individuals in charge do not know the issues and the underlying trade-offs that were allowed. It is imperative that fire sprinkler protection be provided as required by the residential building code.

In closing, a fire protection system is designed to save lives. Fire sprinkler systems must be installed in residential occupancies to protect building occupants and firefighters. House Bill 823 will ensure the State of Maryland's Fire Marshal's office can enforce the fire sprinkler requirement. I would ask the committee to give this legislation a favorable report. Thank you.