



## **House Bill 0823 – Public Safety – State Fire Marshal – Sprinkler Systems Enforcement**

Testimony of John F. Bender, representing the First Responder Center of Excellence, February 25, 2020

Good afternoon Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee.

My name is John Bender and I am here today representing the First Responder Center of Excellence, a Maryland non-profit corporation committed to promoting quality educational awareness and research to reduce physical, emotional, and psychological health and wellness issues for first responders.

I am Vice President and a past Battalion Chief of the Aberdeen *Volunteer* Fire Department, Inc. in Harford County with over 58 years of volunteer service. I am a graduate of the University of Maryland, A. James Clark School of Engineering with a B.S. degree in Fire Protection Engineering. I recently retired with 44 years as a registered and licensed Professional Engineer in Fire Protection with the Factory Mutual Engineering Division in Philadelphia and the Office of State Fire Marshal of Maryland, and Underwriter's Laboratory. For over 35 of those years I was with the Office of State Fire Marshal of Maryland, including over 27 years as the Chief Fire Protection Engineer.

I have also served as a past President of the International Association of Fire Marshals, served on numerous technical

committees of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and was twice elected to serve on the prestigious NFPA Standards Council that oversees the development of all NFPA Codes and Standards. NFPA is a respected world renowned training and research organization and developer of codes and standards that govern fire and life safety technical matters as well as fire service operations, training and equipment. Suffice it to say, I am very familiar with fire sprinkler systems in general and the technical and legislative history of residential fire sprinkler systems in particular having served on numerous State and National committees devoted to this issue.

I will not repeat testimony already given by State Fire Marshal Brian Geraci and others, but my testimony is very brief: This proposed legislation is common sense, effective and efficient legislation. It places enforcement responsibility of residential fire sprinkler systems of one- and two-family dwelling units where it should have been all along - in the hands of the State Fire Marshal. The Office of State Fire Marshal of Maryland is an agency that has the expertise, experience, resources, interest, respect and demonstrated effectiveness in administering the enforcement of such provisions on a consistent state-wide basis in close cooperation with other State and local fire and building departments and other regulatory agencies. The State Fire Marshal, in conjunction with the State Fire Prevention Commission, already has authority by State statute to promulgate the rules and regulations dealing with the technical requirements and enforcement aspects of both commercial and multi-family residential fire sprinkler systems, as well as the

administrative responsibilities of licensing fire sprinkler contractors, so it only makes good common sense to include the actual enforcement of fire sprinkler systems for one- and two-family dwellings as well.

This legislation will help ensure the proper, effective, efficient and consistent enforcement of residential fire sprinkler systems throughout the State of Maryland to save the lives of families, especially young children, the elderly and others who have mobility or cognitive issues that impair or prevent their ability to escape in a timely fashion. Just as important are the lives of firefighters and other first responders, no matter if they are career and volunteer, who are expected to respond to fires in these structures at all hours of the day and night at great risk of their lives and the security of their families. House fires are dangerous and such a common, tragic and devastating event for families and communities. Residential fire sprinkler systems have a proven record to prevent such tragedies. This legislation will help ensure the proper enforcement, installation and operation of these systems. We should all be proud, and thankful, that the State of Maryland is a recognized leader in this matter. Let's keep Maryland moving forward with this common sense legislation!

On behalf of the First Responder Center of Excellence and the dedicated firefighters and other first responders of this State, both career and volunteer, I respectfully urge you to give HB 823 a favorable report. Thank You!