



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0481 - State Fire Marshal - Investigations - Reporting
Requirement
Before the Finance Committee
on February 18, 2021**

Madame Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:


Senate Bill 481 is a simple bill that will only benefit our State. Specifically, it requires the Maryland State Fire Marshal to update the Public Service Commission within 90 days after a fire or explosion, or attempted fire or explosion. Additionally, the bill also requires the Fire Marshal to give updates to the Public Service Commission every 90 days until the investigation is complete. These simple reports would only require updates as to the status of the investigation and the expected date it would be completed.

The reason for this bill now is clear. Last fall an explosion rocked Northwest Baltimore. It destroyed three homes, injured seven people, and killed two residents. The ensuing investigation could not rule out that improper or incomplete installation of a new HVAC system was the cause for the gas leak. However, during the months following the explosion it was extraordinarily difficult for neighbors and elected officials to learn any details of the investigation from State and local fire officials. People in the area wanted assurance that whatever caused the explosion did not continue to pose a threat. In the aftermath of a crisis, the public rightfully expects answers from their elected officials and their government. The process must be standardized and as transparent as possible.

Under current law, there is no requirement for the State Fire Marshal to update the Commission on the investigation of a fire or explosion. However, with SB 481, we can build a safer Maryland. By requiring the Fire Marshal to issue these reports, the investigations will be more thorough and expedient. By improving the investigation system, we can improve fire safety, as well as promote overall public safety. Additionally, the system of reporting investigations creates better public transparency and knowledge regarding fire safety. In addition to being better for the citizens of Maryland, this bill is also of value for the Fire Marshal. Involving the Fire Marshal in these investigations will make sure they are well informed about fires going on in the state, which gives them a broader perspective when formulating policies and procedures.

Transparency between government and the public is necessary to ensure vital information is disseminated on a timely basis. When information is siloed, it undermines public trust in the government and can leave people with more questions than answers. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 481.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jill P. Carter