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Baltimore County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT OF SB614
Public Safety – Fire Dampers, Smoke Dampers, Combination Fire Smoke
Dampers, and Smoke Control Systems

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 21, 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on SB614, Public Safety - Fire Dampers, Smoke Dampers, Combination Fire Smoke Dampers, and Smoke Control Systems. The purpose of this bill is to establish requirements for the installation, inspection, and testing of fire dampers, smoke dampers, combination fire smoke dampers, and smoke control systems.

Sprinklers and fire extinguishers are not the only way to prevent the spread of a fire in a building. Smoke and fire dampers play an invaluable role in preventing the spread of fire and toxic fumes through HVAC ducts. However, there are very few rules regarding the installation and inspection of these systems. According to the University of Maryland's Department of Fire Protection Engineering reliability study published in 2021, out of the 150,000 fire and smoke dampers inspected, 80,000 or 53% required some type of repair. This study reaffirms the importance of periodic inspections.

SB614 provides clear guidance to commercial building owners and HVAC professionals on the proper maintenance to keep these dampers and control systems in working and safe condition. This bill conforms Maryland to the evidence and the approved standards of the National Fire Protection Association. A number of municipalities such as Pittsburgh and Philadelphia have already implemented these standards. Further, both Delaware and Illinois approved similar regulations unanimously.

While I acknowledge the impact this will have on commercial building owners, these inspections and installation requirements are a matter of public safety. Failed smoke control systems have made several deadly fires worse than they otherwise should have been. In the 1980's many of us witnessed the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas take the lives of 85 guests and injure 600 others. These deaths were caused in large part due to smoke inhalation. On June 14, 2017, the fire of the Grenfell Tower in North Kensington, West London, took the lives of 72 occupants. Investigative reports revealed an insufficient damper system contributed to that fire.

Investing in this change now will keep our commercial buildings safer and help protect the lives of Marylanders.

For these reasons I am requesting a favorable report on SB614.

With kindest regards,

Benjamin F. Brooks

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