



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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SB 970

DATE: March 16, 2023

SPONSOR: Senator Smith

ASSIGNED TO: Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT PERSON: Melanie Wenger (melanie.wenger@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: Support

Fire Protection and Prevention – Sprinkler Systems and Smoke Alarms – Requirements (Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act)

Montgomery County strongly supports Senate Bill 970 because the protections it would require could have helped slow the devastating fire last month at a Silver Spring high-rise apartment complex that displaced over 400 residents, led to the hospitalization of 20 people including firefighters responding to the incident, and caused the tragic death of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs.

Beginning July 1, 2023, Senate Bill 970 would require an automatic smoke alarm to be installed in each public corridor accessible by units in a high-rise building. Beginning January 1, 2033, the bill would require every high-rise building to be protected by a complete automatic sprinkler system unless all units in the high-rise building have exterior exit access or each unit of the building is equipped with a fire extinguisher. If a high-rise building is not protected by a complete automatic sprinkler system, beginning July 1, 2023, the owner of the building must conspicuously post written notice in the building warning that the building is not protected by a complete sprinkler system, and the owner must include in any lease agreement a conspicuous notice that the building is not currently protected by a complete automatic sprinkler system and that the building is required to be protected by January 1, 2033. Under the bill, the State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is to identify funding sources that may be available to the owner of a high-rise building to aid the owner in installing a complete automatic sprinkler system. DHCD is to provide funding priority to high-rise buildings that plan to be protected by a complete automatic sprinkler system by 2028. Additionally, Senate Bill 970 prohibits a landlord from requiring a tenant who is deaf or hard of hearing to pay for the purchase or installation of a notification appliance that, when activated, provides a signal that is sufficient to warn the deaf or hard of hearing tenant in a sleeping room of a smoke alarm activation, and prohibits a landlord from requiring a tenant to provide documentation or evidence when the tenant requests such a device be installed.

In 2019, the Maryland State Fire Marshal highlighted the dangers of living in high-rise buildings without sprinkler systems, which have been shown to reduce civilian fire deaths by up to 87%. However, under current State law, older buildings are not required to have these sprinkler systems in place. Montgomery County has more high-rise buildings without complete automatic sprinkler systems than any other jurisdiction in the State. Senate Bill 970 is urgently needed to prevent further tragedies and is critical to the safety of Montgomery County residents and Marylanders across the State. Montgomery County respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 970.