



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

KATE STEWART
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 4

March 15, 2023

Senate Bill 970: Fire Protection and Prevention - Sprinkler Systems and Smoke Alarms - Requirements (Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act)
Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Brian Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

As the Montgomery County Councilmember for District 4, I strongly support the Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act (SB 970/HB 1292) currently under consideration in the Maryland General Assembly. This life-saving legislation aims to provide essential fire safety improvements in older high-rise apartments by requiring all buildings, regardless of construction date, to have a complete automatic sprinkler system installed by January 1, 2033.

Last month, an apartment fire in Downtown Silver Spring resulted in the tragic loss of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs. It displaced over 400 residents and hospitalized 20 people, including firefighters responding to the incident. Unfortunately, the apartment complex was one of the 76 high-rise buildings located in Montgomery County without automatic sprinkler systems.

Studies show that automatic sprinkler systems can reduce civilian deaths by fire by up to 87% and significantly decrease other negative outcomes, including property damage and environmental impact. While newer buildings now require them, many older high-rise apartments still lack this critical safety feature, putting residents at risk.

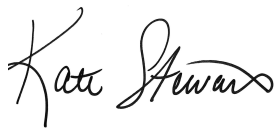
Senate Bill 970 is a significant step forward in protecting tenants living in older high-rise apartment buildings. It requires all high-rise apartment buildings, regardless of construction date, to have automatic sprinkler systems installed by January 1, 2033. Additionally, this bill mandates automatic smoke alarms in every public corridor by July 1, 2023; and requires notice in both the

lease and throughout the building if the complex has not yet been upgraded to include a full automatic sprinkler system.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 970 prohibits landlords from charging deaf or hard of hearing tenants for necessary accessible alarm systems and from charging tenants for smoke alarm reimbursements. It also helps building owners by requiring the Department of Housing and Community Development to work with the State Fire Marshal and Maryland Department of Emergency Management to identify funding sources to help building owners meet these requirements.

Installing automatic sprinkler systems in all high-rise buildings is essential to the safety and well-being of residents and in preventing future fire tragedies. I thank Senator Will Smith for sponsoring this bill and urge this committee to vote favorably for Senate Bill 970 this legislative session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Stewart
Montgomery County Council
District 4