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February 24, 2023

Dear Chair Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Sheet Metal Contractors National Association (SMACNA); Mid-Atlantic Chapter, I write today to express our strong support for House Bill 769, establishing requirements for the installation, inspection, and testing of fire dampers and associated smoke control systems for the welfare and public safety of Maryland buildings and structures. These systems and equipment represent Fire, Life & Safety (FLS).

SMACNA Mid-Atlantic represents 22 construction contracting firms, nearly 1,400 skilled professionals, and dozens of future professionals within the 5-year apprenticeship program. SMACNA Mid-Atlantic is an association of premier construction specialty contractors who utilize the latest technology and complete work to the highest standards as per SMACNA technical standards and manuals widely heralded across the United States and Canada.

The contractors of SMACNA Mid-Atlantic and our association most favorably support House Bill 769 as a critical need to fill a present void of structured and preventative maintenance of fire dampers and associated smoke control sub-systems. Presently, five states already have (FLS) legislation in place. Three other states are currently considering legislation to improve public safety through FLS procedures to comply with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). House Bill 769 would begin the process to bring Maryland in concert with multiple NFPA Standards.

Most importantly, House Bill 769 is an investment into public safety and welfare for all Marylanders.

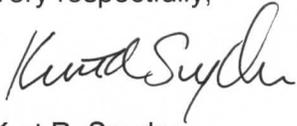
Association member contracting companies and other organizations in Maryland have the certified and technically trained workforce to conduct detailed troubleshooting, inspection, repair, and follow-on preventative maintenance to FLS equipment and fire dampers.

Over the decades, some of the worst structural fires had billowing smoke overwhelm escape routes for occupants, displaced oxygen with toxic agents, and subsequently created chaos for first responders trying to navigate the buildings to begin rescue and establish evacuation routes.

According to a FEMA study in 2020, nearly 65% of counties, cities and towns across the United States lack modern building codes. When FLS systems and standards are not addressed, the 'smoke' has an ongoing opportunity to be both the labyrinth and the Minotaur. Our citizens deserve safe buildings with updated FLS legislation to support these measures.

House Bill 769 is critical for the safety of Marylanders and their families. For these reasons, SMACNA Mid-Atlantic overwhelmingly supports House Bill 769 and asks for a favorable report.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt R. Snyder". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K" and "S".

Kurt R. Snyder
Executive Director
SMACNA Mid-Atlantic