



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 823- FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION- RESIDENTIAL RENTAL PROPERTY-
REQUIREMENTS (MELANIE NICHOLLE DIAZ FIRE SAFETY ACT)

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN
FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Building fire safety equipment saves lives. Compared to fires where no sprinkler system is present, civilian fire deaths are 89 percent lower and civilian injury rates are 27 percent lower in fire emergencies where a sprinkler system is present.¹ When combined with early warning systems, sprinklers contain fires 97% of the time and reduce firefighter injuries by 80%.² In national studies, although 62% of high-rise building fires occur in apartment buildings causing almost \$154 million dollars in direct property damage, these fires generally have lower rates of flame damage beyond the room of origin, lower death rates, and lower associated losses because *they usually have greater use of fire protection systems* compared to shorter buildings.³

This legislation is rooted in a tragic event that occurred in my district. On Saturday, February 18th, 2023, a deadly fire broke out in one of the buildings at the Arrive Apartment complex in Silver Spring. The fire broke out in an apartment on the seventh floor of one of the 15-story buildings. 100 firefighters had to be called to the scene. Multiple people were hospitalized because of injuries sustained in the fire. 400 people were displaced. 25-year-old Melanie Diaz, a beloved community member, died in the fire.

This fire could have been prevented from spreading if sprinklers and other fire safety equipment was installed throughout the building.⁴ This legislation improves safety standards in high rise rental buildings by:

- Requiring smoke detection in public corridors that is in line with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards.
- Requiring fire safety instruction for tenants every 6 months and when tenants change or move in. This instruction should include identification of the occupant notification system and evacuation routes.
- Requiring emergency lights in all common egresses based on codes and regulations of NFPA.
- Ensuring hard of hearing tenants have visual alarms, for which landlords cannot charge them.
- Requiring signage near the entrances indicating a building does not have sprinklers.
- Requiring notice in the lease agreement for new tenants that the building does not have sprinklers.
- Requiring state agencies to look for funding to assist in sprinkler installation and enables counties to create a property tax credit to support sprinkler installation.

¹ <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Suppression/US-Experience-with-Sprinklers>

² <https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/research/nfpa-research/fire-statistical-reports/catastrophic-multiple-death-fires>

³ <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/News-and-Research/Fire-statistics-and-reports/Fact-sheets/HighRiseFactSheet.pdf>

⁴ <https://moco360.media/2023/02/27/del-charkoudian-drafting-bill-to-bolster-fire-safety-measures-in-apartment-buildings-statewide/>

Finally, the bill creates a task force to develop best practices for installation of fire alarm and automatic fire sprinkler systems in high rise buildings built prior to 1974. The requirement to install sprinklers in high rise buildings took effect in 1974, so these buildings have not been required to have sprinklers. This task force will consist of fire safety experts, architects, engineers, and representatives of rental buildings and condominiums. Together they will examine costs, design, installation, maintenance, and other factors to determine potential alternative standards for retrofits.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 823.