



CITY TAKOMA OF PARK MARYLAND

**Support House Bill 823 - Fire Protection and Prevention - Residential Rental Property - Requirements - the Melanie Nicholle Diaz Fire Safety Act
House Environment & Transportation Committee
February 20, 2024**

The City of Takoma Park supports and urges favorable consideration of House Bill 823.

In 2023, a tragic apartment fire in Downtown Silver Spring took the life of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs, displaced over 400 residents, and hospitalized 20 people, including firefighters. Almost 90 apartments in the building were condemned.

There are dozens of high-rise buildings in Montgomery County, including in Takoma Park. This legislation would provide necessary fire safety improvements in high-rise apartment buildings by:

- Requiring the installation of an automatic smoke alarm in each sleeping area within each residential occupancy, including one- and two- family dwellings and apartment buildings.
- Requiring the installation of an automatic smoke alarm in each public corridor accessible by units in residential high-rise buildings beginning on July 1, 2024.
- Providing for each sleeping room occupied by a deaf or hard of hearing individual an approved notification appliance designed to alert those individuals in the case of a fire.
- Prohibiting landlords from charging tenants for smoke alarms or notification appliances.
- Requiring buildings to post a notice in all main building entrances and note in the lease if they do not have automatic sprinkler systems in place.
- Instructing 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.

The bill also gives local jurisdictions the necessary flexibility to go beyond the requirements of the bill. The bill allows local jurisdictions to adopt smoke alarm regulations that are more stringent than the provisions included in the bill. It also provides municipalities, like Takoma Park, the ability to offer tax incentives to encourage apartment building owners or condominium associations to make fire safety improvements.

This bill is important to Takoma Park because the City has experienced first-hand how traumatizing a fire in a multifamily family building can be. Residents expect to feel safe in their homes and assume that proper steps are taken to protect them. This bill takes a common sense approach to protecting lives.

The City of Takoma Park supports HB 823, and encourages a favorable vote.