

Testimony in Support of House Bill 823

Melanie Nicholle Diaz Fire Safety Act

Before the Environment and Transportation Committee: 2/20/2024

Automatic sprinkler systems can reduce civilian death by fire by 85%. According to the National Fire Protection Association, no more than two people have ever been killed by a fire where automatic sprinklers were completely installed and operated properly in a high-rise building. National Fire Protection Association, [Fire Sprinkler Initiative Information](#). In addition to civilian safety, automatic sprinklers decrease the amount of property damage in apartment buildings. Yet, despite the commonsense solution, residents in older high-rise apartments remain at risk. The Melanie Nicholle Diaz Fire Safety Act will curb that risk significantly.

One year ago, a fire in a Silver Spring high-rise apartment complex displaced hundreds of residents, hospitalized 20 civilians and firefighters, and resulted in the tragic death of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs. Last session, while interning with Chairman William Smith's office, I had the opportunity to meet with and escort the Diaz family around the State House. As we went to each legislator's office, I heard Melanie Diaz's father tell the story about the worst day of his life over and over again. Each time he told the story about the losing his daughter he became more emotional and more firm with his policy ask. His ask is a simple one, achieved with common sense legislation like the bill we see here today.

Today's legislation requires owners of high-rise buildings without automatic sprinkler systems to notify its residents both in their lease, and by signage placed in the apartment complexes that the building is not equipped with these life-saving systems. Having to disclose this missing safety precaution will encourage management companies to remedy the deficiency and add sprinkler systems. Tenant knowledge will likely increase demand for the safer buildings, also incentivizing owners to effectively equip their buildings. To match this demand and allow more buildings to have the sprinkler, this bill requires the Department of Housing and Community Development, along with the State Fire Marshal and the Department of Emergency Management, to identify funding sources that will assist owners in installing automatic sprinkler systems. Identifying these funding options for owners should make it easy and affordable for them to install these life-saving systems in their properties.

This is about renter protection. This is about civilian and firefighter safety. And most importantly, this is about making sure that Melanie Diaz's passing inspires positive action for fire safety. For these reasons, I request a favorable report on House Bill 823.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Public Health Law Clinic at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and not by the School of Law, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, or the University of Maryland System.