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Prince George's and
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Environment and Transportation
Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB339
Real Property – Residential Rental Apartments – Air Conditioning Requirements
March 26, 2025
SUPPORT

Good Afternoon Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

For the record, my name is Delegate Mary Lehman and I am here in support of HB339 Real Property – Residential Rental Apartments – Air Conditioning Requirements.

HB339 states that rental units in newly constructed apartment buildings with four or more units must include air conditioning that is capable of cooling each unit to no greater than 80° Fahrenheit. For Maryland's existing building stock, HB339 states that air conditioning must be included only once a rental unit undergoes a renovation that includes the replacement or substantial upgrade of electrical systems or heating systems. This includes replacing a gas boiler, a water heater, or other substantial electrical work.

HB339 notably does NOT specify what type of air conditioning must be installed - I decided to leave that up to the property owners. Any combination of heat pumps, central air, window units or other cooling apparatuses is acceptable under HB339, so long as the unit can be cooled to the 80° threshold. The air conditioning requirement only applies between June 1 and September 30. If this bill sounds familiar to you, it is because it mirrors existing law in both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. The version of the bill before you today is the result of hard work and compromise with groups including the Maryland Multi-Housing Association and Apartment and Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington, who opposed the legislation last year but are neutral on this year's version.

I am asking that you consider this bill not in the context of housing and renters rights, but in the context of public health, disaster mitigation, and community resilience. In 2016, The Maryland Department of Health, along with the University of Maryland School of Public Health, published the Maryland Climate and Health Profile Report. Evidence from the report, which was based on a decade of Maryland hospitalization data, indicated that exposure to extreme heat events are increasing the risk of hospitalization due to heart attacks and asthma. The report also

found that even with current climate change mitigation efforts, extreme heat events will continue to become more common for the foreseeable future.

During the process of constructing this bill, I spoke with Dr. Amir Sapkota, a contributor to the Report. He said that based on the current trajectory of climate change, communities need to adapt. He said that HB339 bill would increase community resilience and, I quote, “prevent many deaths.”

As an example of what can happen when a heat wave strikes a region that is ill-prepared for such conditions, I’d point you to the Pacific Northwest heat wave from the summer of 2021. It killed 200 people in total, 69 of whom were from Multnomah County, Oregon, which includes Portland. A study undertaken by the county dug into the data. It found that, at most, three of the individuals who died had air conditioning units that were on and in working order. In one case a portable air conditioning unit was found in use, but it was not able to keep up with the heat. The Report found that lack of air conditioning was a key driver in mortality.

Last year, this committee, along with my committee, ENT moved the Tenant Safety Act of 2024. It was landmark legislation aimed at providing much needed support to tenants living in unsafe housing conditions. However, because Maryland law has no mention of cooling requirements, or even an indoor temperature maximum for what can be considered habitable, legal action for these unsafe situations face an uphill battle unless cooling is explicitly mentioned in a tenant’s lease. This bill is a first step toward changing that.

I am confident that it will save lives, which is why I am here today urging you for a favorable report. Thank you.

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