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Montgomery County

Environment and Transportation
Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony: HB1221 - Public Safety - Short-Term Rental Units - Fire Safety (Jillian and Lindsay Wiener Short-Term Rental Fire Safety Act)

Committee: Economic Matters

Hearing Date: March 5, 2026

Position: Favorable

Good afternoon Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and members of the Economic Matters committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present this bill today. I am proud to note that Del. Tom Hutchinson is also a sponsor of this bill.

I am Delegate Foley and I am presenting HB1221, the Jillian and Lindsay Wiener Short-Term Rental Fire Safety Act, which will require short-term rentals to equip their homes with appropriate, adequate, and up-to-date fire safety measures while requiring counties to confirm and enforce these requirements.

In 2022, Montgomery County sisters Lindsay and Jillian Wiener, only 19 and 21 years old at the time, died while vacationing at a VRBO property with their family. A fire broke out while the family was sleeping. Parents, Lewis and Alisa Wiener were able to escape and called for their children to do the same. Lewis went back into the home to try to save his children, but became overwhelmed by the flames. Their son, Zach, attempted to save his sisters, but was forced to jump from an upstairs window due to the flames.

Today, Alisa Wiener is here, and you will hear more from her about her nearly 4 years of advocacy to have short-term rental safety reform across our state and across the nation.

This tragedy should never have happened. The home, listed on a short-term rental platform, indicated it had smoke detectors. Yet, these detectors couldn't be heard on the second floor when the fire broke out, nor were they connected properly. This bill could prevent a tragedy like this from occurring in Maryland.

Around the country, it is common for jurisdictions that have some sort of short term rental requirements to have fire safety as a baseline of those requirements. To provide a few examples, there are fire safety requirements for short term rentals in St. Augustine, Florida, Fort Myers

Beach, Florida, Winter Park, Colorado, City of Rio Rancho, New Mexico, LaGrange, Georgia, Austin, Texas, among many others.

Nearby, Virginia has localities with several requirements for short term rentals including Virginia Beach, Richmond, Norfolk, and Arlington.

Maryland does not have a unified fire safety regulation for short-term rentals. Instead, safety rules have been enacted in a patchwork fashion across the state. Several jurisdictions have some sort of short-term rental licensing requirement including: Anne Arundel County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Talbot County, Baltimore County, Gaithersburg, Greenbelt, Salisbury, and Baltimore City. However, with respect to fire safety, the list is much smaller and includes Prince George's County, Montgomery County, Talbot County, and Ocean Pines.

The bill before the committee today fills those gaps and targets three areas in which safety mechanisms will be implemented, enforced, and confirmed.

Should this bill pass, it will be illegal for a short-term rental to operate without a posted evacuation plan, listing of emergency numbers for police and fire, a working fire extinguisher, and working smoke alarms that are in accordance with state and local laws. The smoke detectors must also be connected and clearly audible in all sleeping spaces. We have a sponsor amendment to add carbon monoxide detectors as a requirement, which is supported by the Fire Marshal's office.

The bill defines a short-term rental as an entire dwelling unit, or a room, group of rooms, other living or sleeping space, or any other space within a dwelling, made available for rent by guests for less than 30 consecutive days, where the unit is offered for tourist or transient use by the short-term rental host of the residential unit.

As for the enforcement, each county and Baltimore city will need to enact legislation or regulations to implement and enforce the bill's safety requirements. They will have until July 1, 2028, to report these to the State Fire Marshal. This bill also enables counties to implement registration fees to cover the cost of inspection. These inspections can be conducted by a registered third-party inspector.

If a county already has regulations in place that meet these requirements, they will simply indicate that to the Fire Marshal's office.

Booking services, as defined in the bill, which operate in Maryland will need to notify and confirm with hosts that their homes meet the fire safety requirements in this bill. We have a

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sponsor amendment that will clarify that this notification can be digital and online, as requested by industry representatives.

Our office has been working with Alisa Wiener and the Maryland Association of Counties on this bill. We have also been working with the State Fire Marshal's office, VRBO, and Airbnb.

Tragedies, such as what our Maryland neighbors faced, should never happen in our state. If individuals want to use their homes as businesses, there should be a minimal set of fire safety requirements in place to ensure all those traveling and seeking lodging in our state are safe.

This is a bipartisan bill supported by the Fire/EMS coalition and other firefighter organizations. I urge a favorable report and am happy to answer any questions.