



# Montgomery County

## Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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**HB 149**

**DATE: February 19, 2026**

**SPONSOR: Delegate Charkoudian**

**ASSIGNED TO: Economic Matters**

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**COUNTY POSITION: Support With Amendments (Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services and Fire and Rescue Service)**

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### **Fire Prevention – Assistant Fire Marshals, Residential Rental High-Rise Property Fire Safety Equipment, and Fire Alarm System Technicians**

House Bill 149 establishes qualifications of assistant State fire marshals designated by a county or municipality with the approval of the State Fire Marshal, requires additional fire protection measures for non-sprinklered high-rise rental residential buildings, and establishes licensing of fire alarm system technicians and fire alarm system companies in the State. The Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services supports the bill, with amendments.

The devastating fire at a Silver Spring high-rise apartment complex in 2023 caused the death of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs, led to the hospitalization of 20 people including firefighters responding to the incident, and displaced over 400 residents. The General Assembly responded to this tragedy by passing the Melanie Diaz Fire Safety Act in 2024 that included the requirement for building owners to install smoke detectors in interior public corridors in residential high-rise rental buildings by July 31, 2025, as well as creating the Workgroup to Develop Fire Safety Best Practices for pre-1974 High-Rise Apartment Buildings.

The Workgroup's recommendations, as embodied in HB 149, provide a comprehensive framework for improving fire safety in high-rise apartment buildings that do not have fire sprinkler systems and other fire safety technology. The legislation requires that beginning October 1, 2026, automatic fire sprinklers must be installed in each high-rise rental residential building undergoing substantial renovation as defined as being equal to 40% of the State-assessed value of the building. Additionally, HB 149 includes the recommendation to establish specific standards for individuals engaged in the performance, documentation, planning, and coordination of fire safety inspections critical for ensuring tenant safety in high-rise apartment buildings.

Montgomery County has more high-rise rental residential buildings without complete automatic sprinkler systems than any other jurisdiction in the State. Of these existing buildings, a significant number of them will not be able to permanently alter maximum exit travel distances as required under HB 149. For this reason, the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services urges the Committee to adopt an amendment to remove the provision for maximum exit access travel distances, and instead, add language requiring the replacement of inadequate fire pumps. Adequate fire pumps are essential in high-rise residential buildings to overcome gravity and friction loss, ensuring that sprinkler systems and standpipes on upper floors receive sufficient water pressure which will enhance residential fire safety.

House Bill 149 with these suggested amendments will move the State another step forward in ensuring that high-rise residential buildings are equipped with adequate fire detection and suppression systems. Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services and Fire Rescue Service support the legislation, as amended, and urges the Committee to adopt a favorable report.