



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 149 - FIRE PREVENTION - ASSISTANT FIRE MARSHALLS, RESIDENTIAL RENTAL
HIGH-RISE PROPERTY FIRE SAFETY EQUIPMENT, AND FIRE ALARM SYSTEM
TECHNICIANS

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN
FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

In 2023, a deadly fire broke out in one of the buildings at the Arrive Apartment complex in Silver Spring. Several residents were trapped in their apartments and had to be rescued from their balconies. Multiple people were hospitalized because of injuries sustained in the fire. 400 people were displaced.¹ Melanie Diaz, only 25 years old and a beloved community member, died in the fire.² The building was built before 1974, when the requirement to have sprinklers went into effect, and so they were not required to and did not have sprinklers. This contributed to the effects of the fire being so significant.

In 2024, the General Assembly passed HB823, the Melanie Diaz Fire Safety Act. This bill created a workgroup to develop best practices for installation of fire alarm and automatic fire sprinkler systems in high-rise buildings built prior to 1974 and to study alternative ways of increasing fire safety in these buildings. This bill takes recommendations from the workgroup's report³ and provides a comprehensive framework for physically improving fire safety in these buildings while establishing specific standards for personnel involved in oversight, enforcement, and implementation.

This bill will:

- ✓ Establish standards, training, and a state approval process for all Assistant State Fire Marshals serving counties.
- ✓ Create a licensing program for fire alarm technicians so they go through a standardized training process.
- ✓ Require that high-rise rental buildings that undergo renovations equal to 40 percent of the building's value, must also install fire sprinklers.
- ✓ Require renovated buildings as described above also have these fire protection measures: smoke alarms in sleeping areas, stairwells with certain fire safety features, fire resistant corridor doors, smokeproof exit enclosures, two smoke compartments on each floor, and decreased distance to exits.
- ✓ Change the definition of high-rise buildings to meet the standard set by the National Fire Protection Association.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 149.

¹<https://wjla.com/news/local/silver-spring-apartment-fire-arrive-moco-rescue-montgomery-county-maryland-redsidents-firefighters-dead-firemen-hospital-smoke-downtown>

²<https://wjla.com/news/local/deadly-fire-silver-spring-apartment-arrive-melanie-diaz-cause-source-accident-accidental-victim-family-montgomery-county-maryland-moco-georgia-avenue-deadly-fatal-sprinkler-system>

³[https://dislibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDSP/HB823Ch744\(2\)\(2024\)_2025.pdf](https://dislibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDSP/HB823Ch744(2)(2024)_2025.pdf)