



Bill: **HB 149 - Fire Prevention – Assistant Fire Marshals, Residential Rental High–Rise Property Fire Safety Equipment, and Fire Alarm System Technicians**

Committee: **Economic Matters**

Date: **February 19, 2026**

Position: **Favorable with amendments**

The Apartment and Office Building Association (AOBA) of Metropolitan Washington is a nonprofit trade association representing the owners and managers of more than 23 million square feet of commercial office space and 167,000 apartment rental units in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties. AOBA submits the following testimony in support of House Bill 149.

HB 149 aligns the definition of high-rise building with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) fire codes; mandates additional fire safety measures in residential rental high-rise buildings, including smoke detectors in interior public corridors; and in buildings undergoing substantial renovations the bill requires the installation of automatic fire sprinklers and other enhanced life-safety features. Substantial renovation is defined as a renovation costing at 40% of the assessed building’s value. Finally, it requires the State Fire Prevention Commission to establish licensing and regulatory programs for fire alarm system technicians and companies, similar to existing oversight of fire sprinkler contractors.

AOBA supports efforts to enhance fire safety in multifamily high-rise buildings. This bill strikes the right balance by aligning fire safety retrofits with substantial renovations. AOBA asks that the committee make the following clarifying amendment on page 4, lines 20 – 23:

(II) BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2026, AUTOMATIC FIRE SPRINKLERS SHALL BE INSTALLED IN ACCORDANCE WITH NFPA STANDARDS IN EACH RESIDENTIAL RENTAL HIGH–RISE BUILDING THAT IS UNDERGOING A SUBSTANTIAL RENOVATION THAT RECEIVES BUILDING PERMITS ON OR AFTER THAT DATE.

This amendment clarifies that the bill applies prospectively and not to projects with existing building permits that may be completed after October 1, 2026. Multifamily building owners often seek financing to substantially renovate properties. Applying this bill to projects with existing building permits would increase the costs of those projects and potentially jeopardize the financing.

For these reasons, AOBA urges a favorable report on House Bill 149 with the amendment outlined above. For more information, please contact Brian Anleu at banleu@aoba-metro.org.

