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Personal Statement in support of BILL HB1221

It was August 4, 2022, our land line rang at 6:30am and I answered. Our best friend Lew was on the line. He was calling from a hospital bed in Sag Harbor, NY to tell me and my husband that just three hours before they were awakened by the sound of windows popping, their vacation home was on fire. Lew was burned attempting to rescue his children upstairs, his son was burned and injured from jumping from the second story bedroom window, his daughters, Jillian and Lindsay did not survive the fire. I screamed.

Lew asked us to call their family and friends. The task of calling dozens was unbearable.

If only the owners of the vacation home were required to put batteries in the home's smoke detectors and report that it was done properly, my nieces would be alive today. If my best friends could have read a permit uploaded on the rental site for the property providing proof that working smoke detectors were in the vacation home, this statement would not have to be written. If my best friends knowingly had a choice of whether to select a vacation home with or without working smoke detectors, this statement would not have to be written.

Jillian and Lindsay were my "nieces." Our families were inseparable. Nothing came between us, no distance, no age, we were the Wiener-West family. Best of friends, closest to family. In just moments, the fire took away two of us and changed the rest of our lives forever. The loss is still inconceivable and the feelings are still unbearable. Since the fire, Lew has died of pancreatic cancer, leaving Alisa and her son to face the rest of their lives without the girls and Alisa's husband.

I am writing in today to support the Jillian and Lindsay Wiener Short-Term Rental Fire Safety Act that will establish a statewide fire safety requirement for short-term rental units rented for fewer than 30 consecutive days, effective October 1, 2026. Approval of this bill cannot come soon enough. Jillian and Lindsay would be with us today if this bill existed a mere four years ago. Their mother Alisa Wiener is working tirelessly to make changes in laws that will ensure that her daughters' lives lost were not in vain. The state of Maryland has an opportunity to save lives. Let's do this.

-Natalie West