

**HB 1221 - Public Safety - Short-Term Rental Units - Fire Safety
(Jillian and Lindsay Wiener Short-Term Rental Fire Safety Act)**

Economic Matters Committee

March 5, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

*MHLA is the sole statewide organization dedicated to advocacy on behalf of Maryland's lodging industry. Our industry is a powerful economic engine - **765 hotels** support more than **115,000 jobs** statewide, generate **\$7.2 billion in wages and salaries**, contribute **\$2.4 billion in state and local tax revenue**, and drive **\$10.6 billion in guest spending** that strengthens communities across Maryland.*

On behalf of the Maryland Hotel Lodging Association (MHLA), we respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1221.

HB 1221 would establish basic, common-sense life safety requirements for short-term rentals (STRs), require booking platforms to assist with compliance, and ensure annual local inspections with reporting to the State Fire Marshal. At its core, this legislation is about protecting guests, neighbors, and first responders.

Since June 1, 2019, Maryland has required the collection and remittance of sales tax on STR activity. The General Assembly further strengthened tax compliance through last year's SB 979. However, while tax collection has been addressed, safety oversight remains inconsistent across jurisdictions. Some STRs operate without inspections or verification that basic life-safety measures are in place.

Ensuring that all lodging—regardless of platform or format—meets baseline safety standards is essential.

Safety Requirements Should Apply Consistently

Maryland law already imposes clear, evidence-based safety requirements on hotels, motels, and lodging houses. These include:

- Smoke alarms installed in accordance with nationally recognized safety standards
- Carbon monoxide detection
- Posted fire safety instructions in guest rooms
- Compliance with the State Fire Prevention Code (COMAR 29.06.01)
- Regular inspections conducted by the Office of the State Fire Marshal

These safeguards protect millions of guests annually. Yet many STRs operating as commercial lodging are not subject to comparable inspections or oversight.

Guests in short-term rentals deserve the same fundamental protections as those staying in licensed hotels.

Equal Standards Promote Fairness and Accountability

Maryland hotel operators invest significantly in compliance with fire prevention, building safety, and inspection requirements. By contrast, many STRs operate without equivalent obligations, even when functioning at

commercial scale.

This creates a two-tiered system: one where traditional lodging providers bear the full cost of safety compliance while others compete for the same guests without meeting comparable standards.

HB 1221 helps restore regulatory balance while focusing squarely on life safety.

Community Safety Implications

Short-term rentals are often located in residential structures not designed for transient occupancy. Without inspections, risks increase:

- Inadequate emergency egress
- Missing or non-functional smoke alarms
- Fire hazards in multi-unit buildings
- Unsafe electrical or heating equipment

Maryland's fire safety laws exist because these risks are real and preventable. Fire does not distinguish between hotels and short-term rentals. Safety standards should not either.

Recommendations to Strengthen HB 1221

MHLA supports the bill as introduced and respectfully recommends two clarifying amendments to strengthen its safety objectives:

1. Require carbon monoxide detectors in all STR units, in addition to smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.
2. Strengthen platform accountability by placing clear responsibility on booking services to ensure they facilitate reservations only for legally operating STR units.

Baltimore City already provides a useful model in Article 15, Subtitle 48 § 48-16(b)(5), which prohibits platforms from collecting fees for unlawful short-term rental activity. Similar language would meaningfully enhance compliance statewide.

These measures are low-cost, high-impact, and would greatly assist local enforcement efforts.

Conclusion

HB 1221 establishes basic safety standards, improves accountability, and aligns STR oversight with Maryland's long-standing life-safety framework for lodging establishments.

This legislation is not about limiting short-term rentals. It is about ensuring that every guest—regardless of where they book—receives fundamental safety protections.

For these reasons, MHLA respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1221.

For more information, please contact:

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