



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

KATE STEWART
COUNCILMEMBER
MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

February 19, 2026

TO: The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair, Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Kate Stewart
Montgomery County Councilmember, District 4

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

My name is Kate Stewart and I serve as the Montgomery County Councilmember for District 4. Today, I write on behalf of myself in support of House Bill 149, *Fire Prevention - Assistant Fire Marshals, Residential Rental High-Rise Property Fire Safety Equipment, and Fire Alarm System Technicians*.

The aim of the bill is to tighten fire safety standards in high-rise residential buildings by increasing local oversight and putting in place stricter technical standards for fire protections systems. This bill would authorize a county or municipality to designate fire marshals subject to approval of the State Fire Marshal to conduct inspections and enforcement. HB 149 also requires installation of certain fire prevention in certain high-rise residential buildings, particularly automatic fire sprinkler systems in these buildings that are undergoing substantial renovation. The bill also requires the State Fire Prevention Commission to adopt certain regulations relating to fire alarm system technicians.

In 2023, an apartment fire in Downtown Silver Spring resulted in the tragic loss of 25-year-old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs. It displaced over 400 residents and hospitalized 20 people, including firefighters responding to the incident. Unfortunately, the apartment complex was one

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of the 76 high-rise buildings located in Montgomery County without automatic sprinkler systems. Studies show that automatic sprinkler systems can reduce civilian deaths by fire by up to 87% and significantly decrease other negative outcomes, including property damage and environmental impact. While newer buildings now require them, many older high-rise apartments still lack this critical safety feature, putting residents at risk.

This bill is essential to expand existing fire protections, especially for tenants living in older high-rise apartment buildings. The additional required regulations for designating local fire marshals and licensing and regulating fire alarm system technicians and fire alarm system companies add additional tools to safeguard against future incidents like the one we had in Silver Spring.

Increased fire safety equipment in all high-rise buildings is essential to the safety and well-being of residents and in preventing future fire tragedies. I urge this committee to vote favorably for House Bill 149 this legislative session. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and please don't hesitate to contact my office if you have further questions.