

February 19th, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair, House Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: RE: MBIA Letter FWA HB 149 - Fire Prevention – Assistant Fire Marshals, Residential Rental High-Rise Property Fire Safety Equipment, and Fire Alarm System Technicians

Dear Chair Valderrama,

The Maryland Building Industry Association, representing 100,000 employees of the building industry across the State of Maryland, appreciates the opportunity to participate in the discussion surrounding HB149. We submit this testimony in support with amendments of the bill authorizing counties and municipal corporations to designate certain fire marshals with the approval of the Maryland State Fire Marshal, or to request that the State Fire Marshal designate such officials, and requiring the installation of certain fire prevention systems in certain high-rise residential buildings beginning October 1, 2026.

We support the intent of this legislation. Enhancing coordination between local jurisdictions and the State Fire Marshal’s Office will improve responsiveness, strengthen code enforcement, and promote consistent life-safety standards across Maryland. Providing local governments with the authority to designate qualified fire marshals—subject to state approval and standardized training requirements—strikes an appropriate balance between local flexibility and statewide oversight.

We also support the bill’s focus on improving fire prevention measures in high-rise residential buildings. High-rise structures present unique life-safety challenges, and proactive prevention measures are critical to protecting residents, first responders, and property. Updating safety requirements reflects a responsible and forward-looking approach to public safety.

We would suggest the legislation should establish a clear timeline for State approval or denial of locally designated fire marshals. A defined review period—such as 60 days—would provide predictability and avoid unnecessary administrative delays for local governments seeking to enhance enforcement capacity. Also regarding the compliance date may pose challenges for existing high-rise residential buildings, particularly older condominium and multifamily properties that may require significant retrofitting.

We recommend a phased implementation schedule for existing buildings to allow sufficient time for engineering assessments, budgeting, and construction. New construction should comply upon effective

date, but existing structures should be provided reasonable transition periods or hardship extensions where justified.

With these amendments, this legislation will meaningfully enhance fire safety protections while ensuring reasonable implementation and clarity for all affected parties. We respectfully request a favorable report with amendments.

For more information about this position, please contact Lori Graf at 410-800-7327 or lgraf@marylandbuilders.org.

cc: Members of the House Economic Matters Committee