



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

March 6, 2023

The Honorable Anne Healey
Chair, House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
H-4 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Healey:

As local elected officials representing Montgomery County, we write to you today in strong support of the Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act (House Bill 1292). This critical legislation would require high-rise residential buildings to install an automatic smoke alarm in each public corridor accessible by units in high-rise buildings beginning on July 1, 2023, and codifies in law that after January 1, 2033 all high-rise buildings - regardless of construction date - be protected by an automatic sprinkler system.

Stronger fire safety protections like these could have helped slow the devastating fire last month at a Silver Spring high-rise apartment complex that displaced over 400 residents, led to the hospitalization of 20 people, including firefighters responding to the incident, and caused the tragic death of 25-year old Melanie Diaz and her two dogs. In 2019, the Maryland State Fire Marshal highlighted the dangers of living in high-rise buildings without sprinkler systems, which have been shown to reduce civilian fire deaths by up to 87% - but older buildings, a majority of which are in Montgomery County, are not required to have these sprinkler systems in place.

House Bill 1292 would make life-saving changes during a fire emergency and protect tenants living in older, high-rise apartment buildings. This bill:

- Requires the installation of an automatic smoke alarm in each public corridor accessible by units in high-rise buildings beginning on July 1, 2023.
- Codifies in law that beginning January 1, 2033, each high-rise building regardless of construction date, shall be protected by a complete automatic sprinkler system.
- Prohibits landlords from charging deaf or hard of hearing tenants for necessary accessible alarm systems; and from charging tenants for smoke alarm reimbursements.
- Requires buildings to post a notice in all main building entrances and note in the lease if they do not have automatic sprinkler systems in place.
- Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development to work with the State Fire Marshal and Maryland Department of Emergency Management to identify funding sources to help building owners meet these requirements.

Since a majority of the older, unprotected buildings are in Montgomery County, we believe this legislation is urgent to prevent further tragedies and critical to the safety of constituents. Thank you to Delegate Charkoudian for being the House sponsor, and to this committee for considering the advancement of House Bill 1292 this legislative session.

Sincerely,



Councilmember Kate Stewart
District 4



County Executive Marc Elrich



President Evan Glass
At-Large



Councilmember Gabe Albornoz
At-Large



Councilmember Marilyn Balcombe
District 2



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At-Large



Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles
At-Large



Councilmember Sidney Katz
District 3



Natali Fani-González
District 6



Councilmember Kristin Mink
District 4



Councilmember Dawn Luedtke
District 7



Vice President Andrew Friedson
District 1

cc: Honorable Adrienne A. Jones, Speaker of the House of Delegates
Members of the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
Members of the Montgomery County Delegation