

Hello Members of the county council,

I am submitting this written testimony in support of Bill 7-24, Landlord-Tenant Relations – Tenant Protection and Notification, and I strongly urge the council to pass the bill.

The bill would make several important improvements to information disclosures provided to renters in the county. Its requirement for a residential lease to better clarify what is and is not covered by insurance policies offered by management will help avoid repeats of unfortunate cases where renters were lead to believe they had been provided renter insurance that will cover their possessions, when instead it was a policy protecting the building only. Obviously both types of insurance are important, but they are very distinct, and as someone who has signed my fair share of leases and other paperwork, I can see how people would be confused. Whether they “should” know better or not is academic, better disclosures will help make better decisions, and \*that\* will help people be better protected in the case of a destructive fire or other incident.

Similarly, it may sound basic and obvious whether a building has a sprinkler system or not, but in the wake of the fire at the Arrive that took the life of Melanie Diaz, I spoke to more than one person, including several close friends, who never even stopped to check. On some level, that makes sense, when we choose a place as our home, we have a basic assumption that some basic safety measures are in place. Further, unless it is presented to us front and center, it’s pretty unlikely that the average person will look up fire safety plans, the location of fire extinguishers, and the like. This bill would require all of that information to be provided more clearly, and require disclosure if sprinkles are not included, which shockingly is not already the case.

People will pause to read the disclosure when they sign a lease before they will randomly look around for sprinklers that they will probably assume are there, maybe to realize only too late that they are not. It might influence the decision people make as to where to rent, or it just may make them more aware of the need for a fire safety plan of their own, but either way, the information helps them make a more informed choice as a consumer.

The bill will also work well in concert with the recently passed (at the state level) Melanie Diaz Fire Safety Act which establishes related fire safety requirements, to put residents in the best position they can regarding fire safety.

For what it’s worth, and like Delegate Charkdouian’s legislation I note above, everything in this bill is even more important now that the Governor has announced that he will not enforce the fire marshall’s mandate to retrofit sprinklers into high rises that do not already have them. While these are common sense requirements that I would urge the county to adopt in any

circumstance, now that we know that a broad application of an active fire safety feature is not coming, we have to enhance and expand the remaining tools we have. Lives and livelihoods are in the balance.

Thank you,

Mike English

