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Testimony of Assistant Fire Marshal Robert Sollitto Concerning HB 5394
Public Safety & Security Committee
March 6 2012

Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee - My name is Robert Sollitto and I am an Assistant Fire Marshal for the City of Stamford. My professional experience and background extends over 26 years of fire service and safety experience with the Stamford Fire & Rescue Department. I am here today to respectfully urge your support for HB 5394 - An Act Concerning Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors and Alarms in Residential Buildings.

In my 17 years as a fire marshal, I have been the lead investigator on over 300 fires and assisted on many others. These incidents have occurred in just about every type of occupancy that we have characterized in the Connecticut Fire Code. I have seen, first-hand, the value of having smoke detection devices installed in residential living spaces. I can easily estimate that hundreds of people have escaped harrowing situations because of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. We will never see newspaper articles written about the survivors, because their smoke detectors WORKED! Most house fire deaths occur because victims do not know their building is on fire until it is too late to escape. Either they become trapped or they are overwhelmed quickly by smoke and carbon monoxide poisoning. When fires occur at night, many people either wake up when it is too late, or do not wake at all, dying in their sleep from the hypoxia and carbon monoxide poisoning. The effects of carbon monoxide poisoning can drastically affect a person's ability to save themselves from an emergent situation. Some of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are -

- Exhaustion and fatigue
- Reduced muscle coordination and balance (instability when walking)
- Involuntary muscle twitching/jerking
- Tremors
- Headaches
- Irregular heart beat
- Difficulty processing visual information, particularly faster moving images
- Spotty and/or blurred vision
- Difficulty hearing
- Hearing high pitch noise
- Muscle/joint pain/cramping

Can anyone imagine having these deficiencies and try to work their way to safety through an already disorientating scene of smoke and heat?

The largest percentage of fire deaths in the home occurs at night while people are asleep. Therefore, a working smoke and carbon monoxide alarm can provide an early warning that can make the difference between life and death. According to studies published by the National Fire Protection Association, having a smoke alarm cuts your risk of dying in a fire by nearly half, with some studies indicating decreases of over 85%.

Almost three-quarters (71%) of the reported home structure fires and 84% of the fatal home fire injuries occurred in one- or two-family homes. Almost two-thirds of the fire deaths resulted from fires in homes *without* working smoke alarms.

Moreover, smoke alarms can prove to be a very cost-effective intervention. One study showed that every \$1 spent on smoke alarms saves \$28 of health-related expenditures on burn care and other fire related injuries.¹

In the past 5 years, Connecticut has lost approximately 95 persons due to fire related injuries. If we apply the national percentages, which states that 2/3rds of all fire deaths occur in homes without smoke detectors, we could estimate that approximately 60 persons died in Connecticut residences that had no smoke detection devices installed.

If each of these homes had functioning smoke detectors, these same percentages would indicate that an additional 30 lives could have been saved.

In conclusion, we must acknowledge that in life, things happen. Winds blow, materials deteriorate, actions occur. Sometimes, a confluence of innocuous events and conditions can synergize to create the greatest of all tragedies. You have it within your influence to help neutralize the chaos that resulted in the deaths of 5 innocent people this past Christmas Day. No, this act will not bring them back, but it will make their sacrifice stand for something. With your help, their loss can result in the saving of the life of another innocent victim.

*Data for entire year not yet published by the State of Connecticut

¹ Source: Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, USA