



Fire and Rescue Department

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HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

Re: HB 5934 – An Act Concerning Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors and Alarms in Residential Buildings

Chief Anthony Conte – Fire Chief Stamford Fire and Rescue Department

Senator Hartley, Representative Dargen and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee my name is Anthony Conte and I am the Fire Chief for the Stamford Fire and Rescue Department for which I have served for 38 years. I am here today to respectfully urge your support for Raised Bill 5394 - An Act Concerning Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors and Alarms in Residential Buildings.

Throughout my career, starting as a Firefighter in 1974, I witnessed many tragedies. The latest and I must say one of the saddest, occurred this past Christmas.

At 04:52 am, Christmas Morning 2011, Stamford Emergency Communications, our 911 center, received a phone call that the house next door to the caller was on fire, she stated it was “a Huge Fire” and “there are 3 kids and a mother”. The caller had been awoken by the screams of the mother not the fire itself. While our units were enroute three more frantic 911 calls were received once again reporting trapped children. The house was a large 2 ½ story Victorian built around the turn of last century and was under construction at the time of the fire.

Stamford Fire Rescue Engine 4 was the first unit to arrive and reported heavy fire showing from the first floor of the 2 ½ story house.



Photo courtesy of Tim Curtain

The mother, Mrs. Badger, was trapped on the front porch roof screaming to please “Save My Children”, “My Whole Life Is in There”. The crew went to rescue the mother; she was frantically screaming that her trapped children were on the third floor. The crew immediately ascended the scaffolding from the porch roof to the third floor that was exposed to high heat and choking smoke exiting from the first and second floors, to make a rescue attempt. The Captain entered the third floor through a window and only after a few feet was driven out by high heat and flames; the heat so intense that this fully equipped and protected officer received second degree burns to his face. Even so he and his crew made a second attempt to reach the trapped children.

Additional Fire units arrived on the scene and immediately tried to make entry into a fully involved structure. Some units were attempting rescues while others were trying to advance hoselines to protect the victims and the rescuers from the quickly advancing and extremely hot fire. The Rescue Captain, while attempting to conduct a search on the first floor, radioed to the Incident Commander that the fire and smoke conditions were extremely heavy and parts of the house had already collapsed. The Rescue Captain, along with his crew, attempted another search this time on the second floor when he felt the floor shift in a different direction from the walls indicating a collapse of the structure may be imminent.

The Incident commander, though with the full knowledge of five trapped occupants to include the three children, was forced to make a most dreadful decision, remove all firefighters from the inside of the structure, calculating that the danger to firefighters, from the heavy fire that had taken hold of the whole house and deteriorating structural conditions with signs of imminent collapse, was too great to continue and the viability of the victims had sadly already past from the extremely hot and smoky conditions.

The fire was then extinguished allowing the crews to more safely turn their attention to the grim task of searching for and removing the bodies from a building that was no longer sound.

The effects of this horrific fire will be felt by the Badger and Johnson families forever. This horrific fire will also reverberate through my department, the screams and pleas of the mother to rescue her family, the sight of the house being totally consumed and all firefighting efforts just not being enough to save the three children and their grandparents will haunt Stamford firefighters thoughts forever. Christmas will never be the same again.

As Chief of the Stamford Fire and Rescue Department and in the name of Fire Safety I appeal to you not to allow this to happen to anyone else. I urge you to support HB 5934 – An Act Concerning Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors and Alarms in Residential Buildings. A smoke detector is necessary to notify the occupants in case of fire. There is no way to assure smoke detectors will be functioning in every home that catches fire, but it is my professional opinion as the Chief of the Stamford Fire and Rescue Department that this bill goes a long way to that end.

I thank you for your time and your anticipated support.