



**American
Red Cross**

**American Red Cross
Testimony to the Joint Committee on Public Health
of the Connecticut General Assembly
in support of S 1012
An Act Concerning Smoke Alarms in Residential Buildings
March 3, 2015**

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My name is Paul Shipman. I am Chief Communication Officer with the American Red Cross Connecticut and Rhode Island Region and I am here today on behalf of the American Red Cross to offer testimony in support of Raised Senate Bill 1012, An Act Concerning Smoke Alarms in Residential Buildings. The Red Cross is deeply committed to preventing residential fires and reducing deaths and injuries caused by these fires. We strongly support legislation that could help to achieve these goals.

The Red Cross has recently announced a national campaign to reduce deaths and injuries from home fires by as much as 25 percent over the next five years. A cornerstone of this campaign is an effort to increase the use of smoke alarms and to encourage all Americans to practice their fire escape plans that can increase their chances of safely escaping a fire.

Smoke alarms cut the risk of death from a fire in half. Updating fire safety code to require newly constructed residential properties to have installed long-life battery powered smoke alarms will help to increase the safety of Connecticut residents.

The long-life smoke alarms feature two important safeguards. They offer non-replaceable batteries that make the units more tamper resistant. They also help increase the likelihood that the entire unit will be replaced when the battery is depleted, which corresponds to the time frame when the detection materials in the alarms begin to degrade. This helps to ensure the proper functioning of the smoke alarm over its lifetime.

A survey conducted for the Red Cross in July of 2014 shows that people mistakenly believe they have more time than they really do to escape a burning home. Fire experts agree that people may have as little as two minutes to escape a burning home before it is too late to get out. Smoke alarms are a key to early warning that can buy every second of the precious time needed to escape a fire.

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But most Americans (62 percent) mistakenly believe they have at least five minutes to escape, more than twice the amount they actually have. Nearly 18 percent erroneously believe they have ten minutes or more to get out.

When asked about their confidence levels in escaping a burning home, about 42 percent of those polled said they could get out in two minutes. Nearly seven in 10 parents (69 percent) believe their children would know what to do or how to escape with little help.

However, the poll showed few actions had been taken that would support the level of confidence of parents about their children's ability to escape a fire:

- Fewer than one in five families with children age 3-17 (18 percent) have actually practiced home fire drills.
- Fewer than half of parents (48 percent) have talked to their families about fire safety.
- Only one third of families with children (30 percent) have identified a safe place to meet outside their home.

The Red Cross works with local fire departments and nationally with partners like the National Fire Prevention Association to help educate people about the risks posed by home fires and how to reduce their frequency and to keep people safe in the event of fire. Legislation that would increase the use of long-life battery powered smoke alarms in residential buildings where battery powered smoke alarms are used will help provide for improved chances of families being able to safely escape a home fire.

Thank you for your consideration of this important and life-saving legislation.