



CONNECTICUT FIRE MARSHALS ASSOCIATION

**Testimony Before the Public Safety and Security Committee
HB 6777 AN ACT REQUIRING THE INSTALLATION OF AUTOMATIC
FIRE EXTINGUISHING SYSTEMS IN NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS
February 19, 2015**

Senator Larson, Representative Dargan and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, my name is Kevin Kowalski and I have been the Fire Marshal of Simsbury for the past 30 years. In addition to my role as Fire Marshal, I have been in the fire service for 40 years and work with the Connecticut Fire Marshals Association on legislative issues. The Connecticut Fire Marshals Association extends their gratitude to the Committee for the opportunity to speak in **support** of House Bill. **No. 6777 AN ACT REQUIRING THE INSTALLATION OF AUTOMATIC FIRE EXTINGUISHING SYSTEMS IN NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS.**

The fire service industry has been working to have automatic sprinklers installed in dwellings for at least 17 years as we believe that this is the best way to reduce the fire deaths. The association believes that sprinklers will reduce fire deaths in dwellings significantly more than smoke detectors. It is especially upsetting that the everyday person is being killed by fires in the place where they feel the safest, their own home.

Those who oppose sprinklers have done so based on price, design, water supply, and the promise that they are unwarranted because 'new houses will not burn.' Unfortunately, a new house becomes an old house that burns, and that is prevalent. Studies have found that the building materials and contents of the modern homes are more flammable than ever before and will fail catastrophically in very short order.

Over the last several years there has been positive change in the sprinkler industry. Connecticut operates under two codes written by two publishers and organizations; The NFPA (National Fire Protection Association), which has required residential sprinklers for some time, and most recently the basic residential one to two family code (IRC) from the ICC which requires that Residential sprinklers installed. Although it may seem "automatic" for Connecticut to adopt these regulations there has

*Fire marshal Kevin J Kowalski
Legislative affairs*



CONNECTICUT FIRE MARSHALS ASSOCIATION

been a great deal of push-back from the Home builders and others in the industry that are in the majority on the codes and standards committees which approves changes to the code. These aforementioned interest groups have elected to forego these life saving requirements from the code. While smoke alarms and Carbon Monoxide Detectors (CO Detectors) *are* required in homes and schools when built after 1978, these devices alone cannot thwart a theoretically **avoidable** deaths of people in their residence.

The sprinkler industry has relentlessly taken on this project, investing unprecedented time and money into design and development due to this nationwide requirement.

Most new sprinkler systems do not require large amounts of water, nor do they require a connection into public water supplies. Furthermore, the result of a sprinklers use in an emergency situation averages 7 gallons of water (controlled average room and “contents fire”) thus allowing people to move back into a domicile within a day or two. In terms of ‘cost factors’, It goes without saying that there is no price on a human life. Further potential cost factors I will leave up to the installers that will testify here today but there have been large reductions in the average cost of installation especially in those areas of the country requiring their installation. California, which has embraced the use of Sprinklers, saw their industry grow exponentially while seeing a significant reduction in pricing, almost by 50%. In addition, there is no substantial reduction in home sales in relation to the implementation of this requirement, regardless of what many in the Home Builders Association have suggested.

The date that was selected (January 1, 2017) will give the industry and The Fire Marshals Association collectively, the respective time and ability to be prepared for the installations and to work out any issues that may arise; these areas are potentially with water purveyors, licensing and implementation of new technology (as well as its associated learning curve). In short, fire deaths drop to roughly half of their current numbers in areas where smoke detectors are required; this bill is a prime opportunity for the State of Connecticut to see those same substantial reductions of those very avoidable numbers published each year, in our state.