



**HOME BUILDERS & REMODELERS ASSOCIATION
OF CONNECTICUT, INC.**

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*Your Home
Is Our
Business*

March 3, 2015

To: Senator Timothy D. Larson, Co-Chairman
Representative Stephen D. Dargan, Co-Chairman
Members of the Public Safety & Security Committee

From: Bill Ethier, CAE, Chief Executive Officer

Re: **SB 1012, AAC Smoke Alarms in Residential Buildings**

The HBRA of Connecticut is a professional trade association with about eight hundred (800) member firms statewide employing tens of thousands of CT's citizens. Our members, all small businesses, are residential and commercial builders, land developers, remodelers, general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers and those businesses and professionals that provide services to our diverse industry and to consumers. We build between 70% to 80% of all new homes and apartments in the state each year and engage in countless home remodeling projects.

The HBRA of CT neither supports nor opposes SB 1012 but raises concerns of unintended and potentially disastrous consequences with the requirement to install smoke detectors with nonreplaceable, nonremovable batteries that can power a unit for ten years. The cost differential between a regular battery and a 10-yr battery is insignificant given the life safety protection smoke detectors provide. So, cost should not be an issue for this new requirement. But, SB 1012's attempt to provide easier management of this protection for homeowners could have adverse consequences when it comes time to replace hard-wired units.

As we noted in our testimony in opposition to HB 6777, requiring fire sprinkler systems in new homes, the overwhelming evidence shows that it is smoke detectors that save lives in homes. **NFPA data shows that for every 1,000 reported home fires, homes with hard-wired, battery backup smoke detectors have a survival rate of 99.62%.** At first glance, the requirement in SB 1012 to have smoke detectors powered by a 10-year battery seems like a good idea. People would not have to check and replace the battery on multiple units every six months (e.g., "change the clocks, check your batteries"). However, for some people that regular check is not an imposition and provides a level of comfort to them. A 10-year "schedule" could breed complacency.

Also, where smoke detectors are also hard-wired with battery backup (i.e., which has been required by statute in all new residential construction since 1985), what happens when the 10-year battery fails? Homeowners cannot simply replace the battery because SB 1012 requires units to have nonreplaceable and nonremovable batteries. There would no longer be an option to use replaceable batteries. Because they are hard-wired, home owners will have to hire an electrician to change every unit in their homes and many will find some other way to disable the low battery beeping sound in the interim. **The hassle, time and**

cost of hiring an electrician to replace all the units (not just the batteries) in a home means that some (or many) homeowners will simply procrastinate and they will then be left unprotected.

The complacency or procrastination unintentionally generated by this bill could have potentially disastrous consequences for homeowners 10 years from the effective date of the bill.

A better solution might be to urge manufacturers to develop as an option for consumers a standardized hard-wired-with-battery-backup unit whereby homeowners can easily replace on their own a 10-yr battery.

Thank you for considering our thoughts on this legislation.