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State of Connecticut
Public Safety and Security Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3600
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Please Support HB 5278 Mandating Fire Sprinklers in 2-Family New Homes and SB 238, a Local Option for Mandating Sprinklers in new homes.

Members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety & Security,

My name is Tim Travers and I am a Fire Sprinkler Specialist with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Founded in 1896, NFPA is a global, nonprofit organization devoted to eliminating death, injury, property and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards. On behalf of our 60,000 members worldwide, many living in Connecticut, I am writing to request that your committee support the passage of HB 5278 and SB 238.

Opponents in CT say "Sprinklers in NEW 1&2 Family Homes Will Not Save Lives."
You will hear sprinkler opponents using a statistic of 99.4% to illustrate the effectiveness of smoke alarms in reducing home fire deaths. This NFPA statistic is based on the total number of fires, the vast majority of which are not fatal. Does that mean 2,500 deaths every year are acceptable? Most people would say no. It is similar to saying that because the survivability of motor vehicle crashes is also around 99.4%, that we should not look for ways to improve highway safety. Smoke alarms and fire sprinklers provide the required level of fire safety in the home, just as seat belts and airbags do so in cars.

Opponents in CT say "Installing sprinklers in new 1&2 family homes addresses the wrong homes. Homes built to older codes are far more dangerous. New homes are simply built better than they used to be."
Opponents of residential fire sprinkler systems like to boast that newer homes are safer homes and that the fire and death problem is limited to older homes. Age of housing is a poor predictor of fire death rates. When older housing is associated with higher rates, it usually is because older housing tends to have a disproportionate share of poorer, less educated households. Statistically, the only fire safety issue that is relevant to the age of the home is outdated electrical wiring. Beyond that, age of the home has little to nothing to do with fire safety.

Opponents in CT say "The cost for individual new home buyers would be $10,000 for a very small home to $20,000 and up for a typical new 1 or 2 family home."

The Fire Protection Research Foundations' Home Fire Sprinkler Cost Assessment- 2013 report revealed that the cost of installing home fire sprinklers averages $1.35 per square sprinklered foot (SF) for new construction. The data included in the report also reflects the sprinkler system bid price plus all associated costs for the system which were not included in the bid, such as; permit fees, increase in water service line, and increase in tap fee. A survey of builders by the National Association of Home Builders revealed that the estimated average new home in 2015 will measure 2,152 square feet. That would place cost to install sprinklers at around $3,000.

Opponents in CT say "Fire sprinklers are a choice home buyers should make for themselves."
Building, fire, and life safety codes must always be guided by minimum codes and policy decisions and are not a matter of consumer choice. These safety standards are always included in the fixed costs of homes, cars, etc. Only the original buyers of "custom homes" will be able to make the choice. Buyers of "spec" homes and existing homes will be deprived of the ability to make that choice. Requiring home fire sprinklers protects the housing stock for the next 75-100 years.

Opponents in CT say "Fire deaths in homes have been decreasing nationally..."
In fact, overall for the 1977-2013 period the death rate per 1,000 home fires was 8.1 in 1977 and 7.5 in 2013 for a decrease of 7%. These results suggest that even though the number of home fires and home fire deaths declined, the death rate did not, and that given there is a home fire, the fire death rate risk has not changed much for the period.

Opponents in CT say "Adding costs to new homes keeps potential buyers in older homes, potentially increasing their risk of fire-related injuries or death."
The argument that the 1% added cost typical for the fire sprinkler system is chasing away thousands of potential buyers has no validity. A fire sprinkler system can be installed in affordable housing, median priced housing and the high-dollar housing. The new homebuilder opposes any and all actions that may raise the cost of the home. The NAHB actively opposed smoke detectors when they hit the market in the 1970s - the NAHB actively opposed ground fault circuit interrupters when they too became a code requirement about this same era, both these products intended for life safety.

Home fire sprinklers are the right choice for Connecticut. Sprinklers have been protecting lives for over 100 years throughout the United States. When a civilian is killed in a home fire it is tragic, and when a firefighter is killed it is not part of the job. When there is a fire death something went horribly wrong. Home fire sprinklers are a proven technology and can prevent these tragic deaths.

During your deliberations please focus on the life-saving value of home fire sprinklers. Your actions can save future generations from dying in home fires and better protect your first responders.

Respectfully,

Timothy P. Travers

Fire Sprinkler Specialist
National Fire Protection Association