Testimony Before the Public Safety & Security Committee, March 1, 2016

HB 5278 AN ACT CONCERNING AUTOMATIC FIRE EXTINGUISHING SYSTEMS IN RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS DESIGNED TO BE OCCUPIED BY TWO FAMILIES
SB 238 AN ACT CONCERNING ADOPTION OF MUNICIPAL ORDINANCES REGARDING AUTOMATIC FIRE EXTINGUISHING SYSTEMS IN NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

Representative Dargan, Senator Larson and Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee;

My name is Keith Flood, and I am the Fire Marshal for the West Haven Fire Department as well as the President of the Connecticut Fire Marshal's Association (CFMA) and Chair of the Connecticut Fire Sprinkler Coalition. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the CFMA and the CT Fire Sprinkler Coalition regarding House Bill No 5278: AN ACT CONCERNING AUTOMATIC FIRE EXTINGUISHING SYSTEMS IN RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS DESIGNED TO BE OCCUPIED BY TWO FAMILIES AND S.B. No. 238 AN ACT CONCERNING ADOPTION OF MUNICIPAL ORDINANCES REGARDING AUTOMATIC FIRE EXTINGUISHING SYSTEMS IN NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS.

I would first like to thank the Committee for entertaining a public hearing on such an important topic that not only affects the fire service as a whole but the residents of the State of Connecticut.

Both the CFMA and the CT Fire Sprinkler Coalition are in favor of adopting H.B 5278 and/or S.B 238. Sprinklers located in one and two family homes will prevent firefighter deaths and injuries. While we respect the Committee's thought to require sprinklers in new two family homes, the greater goal would be to require them in new one and two family homes. The option to allow a local municipality the ability to determine the type of fire safety that they choose would be a fair alternative to a mandate in the current fiscal climate in Connecticut. **Now is the time for change.**

Smoke alarms are early warning devices that assist with alerting residents of a fire but smoke alarms in conjunction with residential sprinklers reduce the risk of dying in a fire by 80% versus 50% with smoke alarms alone. Sprinklers also reduce the amount of property damage by 70%, mostly because under most instances only one sprinkler activates 85 percent of the time. This is contrary to what is displayed in Hollywood. **Now is the time for change.**

The installation of residential sprinklers will lower insurance claims and keep residents in their homes after a fire. In the majority of cases, families are removed from their homes for up to or over one year after a fire. The relocation of fire victims creates undo stress and excessive insurance claims. For example, the city of Westport saw a sprinkler save just two weeks ago. The sprinkler activation kept the family in their home instead of being relocated for at least a year. **Now is the time for change**.

The model safety code, the International Residential Code, is the current code in use for the construction of new one and two family homes. The State of Connecticut currently uses the 2009 version of the code and the sprinkler requirements were removed by the Codes and Standards Committee. The same requirements were again voted on and removed by the Codes and Standards Committee for the 2012 version of the IRC. The use of lightweight construction methods, which consist of trusses and engineered beams, are dependent upon the installation of residential sprinklers because of the inherent fire safety problems with the use of lightweight construction. Newer homes are being built with a more open floor plan. The open floor plan together with the materials that interior furnishings are made with reduce the time for escape from a home fire to under 3 minutes. **Now is the time for change**.

The Connecticut Fire Sprinkler Coalition consists of stakeholders from various entities including Fire Marshals, Building Officials, The State Fire Marshal, Fire Chiefs, sprinkler and plumbing contractors, and housing prosecutors to name a few. Our focus is to educate people on the advantages of having a residential sprinkler system in their home. Over the last twelve months our coalition has conducted several side by side demonstrations and has reached out to educate different stakeholders in the State. We have been getting great feedback on the demonstrations and the information given. My question is this: Is the cost of one life worth the cost of a residential sprinkler system? The cost is roughly equal to that of a granite counter top or wall to wall carpeting in a new home. Is that worth the life of even one resident? **Now is the time for change.**

The Public Safety Committee I speak before tonight has the ability to make a statement that will put Connecticut on the map and make us a SAFER state**. Now is the time** to adopt H.B 5278 and/or S.B. 238 in the State of Connecticut.