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March 5, 2025

LD 659 An Act to Reduce Housing Costs for Single-family Homes and 2-Family Homes

Senator Chip Curry

Representative Traci Gere

RE: LD 659

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

My name is Carl M Chretien resident of Saco, I'm here representing myself and the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Maine.

NFPA – National Fire Protection Association, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, Massachusetts U.S. 02169-7471

NAHB - National Association of Home Builders, 1201 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005

I am in favor of this bill as it helps to makers home more affordable by removing an onerous requirement of installing a fire sprinkler system. These systems are unduly expensive especially where municipalities have low water pressure and in rural areas here homes are on dug or artesian wells. They often require holding tanks to store water where the source has low volumes. In systems that require pumps they require ongoing maintenance and testing which often doesn't happen even in commercial buildings. Having done work on a 4-unit building in Portland that required semiannual inspections this propert did not have an inspection for seven years till we had to extend it.

LD 659 addresses a back doorway of communities to enact fire sprinkler systems that sidestep LD 2257 enacted on April 24, 2008 to create a single state wide building code to better serve the citizens of Maine which would create uniformity in the built environment. This act repealed many discontinuous sections of statute and created one section under one title. PUBLIC Law, Chapter 699, An Act To Establish a Uniform Building and Energy Code (maine.gov).

Notes From NAHB

Fires Are More Likely in Older Homes
Home fires are tragic. But changing residential building codes to allow sprinklers won't change that, because they apply only to new homes. And that fact is that in the limited number of states where we have been able to match the age of the affected homes with standard national fire data, it's clear that fatalities are concentrated in older homes. To reduce fatalities, we need to make older homes safer. That's where working smoke alarms make a life-saving difference.

Residential Fire Sprinklers Aren't Designed to Save Property

35 Berry Road | Saco, Maine 04072-9744 | Phone 207.284.5843 | Fax 207.284.5843 | Cell 207.229.5843 | Email carl-ch@chretienconstructioninc.com

Fire sprinklers as damage preventers? Don't go there. Studies that "prove" reduction in property loss by 70% are inconsistent with established studies that indicate that in some cases, fire sprinklers increase property loss because of the significant water damage they can cause. If the occupants are away or in a different part of the house — or if they accidentally discharge — the amount of water released can be quite considerable.

Smoke Alarms Work
If that 80% figure were accurate, we wouldn't be having this discussion. But unfortunately, the numbers supplied by fire sprinkler manufacturers are based largely on multifamily properties — whereas the code addresses single- and two-family dwellings. It also doesn't include instances where the sprinklers did not operate or when it's not known whether they did. Here's a fact that's more relevant: Ensuring that every home had at least one working smoke alarm would save about 890 lives every year in our country. This would benefit everyone — not just those who can afford a new home.

Sprinklers Aren't Cost Effective
It's simply inaccurate to say that residential sprinklers average about 1% of a home's cost – unless you are talking about a home with a price far above the national median. The Fire Protection Research Foundation puts the cost at an average of $6,000. That additional cost prices out many would-be home buyers — and doesn't even include the additional cost of regular maintenance to keep the sprinklers operating effectively.

A study done for the state of New York ATT 2-Intro-and-Exec-Summary.pdf
Article that NFPA asked the NAHB to write Fire Protection Engineering - 2016.Q2 - page 8
Smoke detectors saves lives fire-sprinkler-infographic.pdf
US Fire Administration data Home Fire Fatalities in the News
Home Innovations Lab (NAHB Research Center) study residential-fire-sprinkler-survey-data-presentation.pdf

Having spent the last 10 years gathering an filtering thru the data from the US Fire Administration to determine the age of homes as well as pulling deaths out that fire sprinklers have no effect on such as camper, single – double wide HUD homes (manufactured and mobile homes) as well as deaths from outdoor fires. The data shows all but 2 deaths in homes built before 1970 in which this was the start of adding fire blocking as well as when smoke detectors became available on the market. It was in the early 70's when the fire service started going door to door to sell the battery ones, in which the recommended one per floor and in the attic. Mind you these were not interconnected like they are today. The data and reports that the State Fire Marshall's office sends out is raw data that has not been reviewed to understand what's in as well as to determine if there duplicate entry's I will provide data as well as summaries of why this a bill that needs to be passed. The additional cost of $15,000 plus or minus doesn't justify the additional cost for very little extra safety. Codes are meant to be minimum, and the addition of sprinklers has a negligible payback.

What people don't know is that the fire sprinkler requirement in the 2009 IRC was put by a vote that included people from the fire service who did not have voting privileges and were allowed because of the last-minute entries of supposed governmental voters that overwhelmed the credential committee and only found out after the vote was cast. ICC after reviewing with a fact-finding board left it in and expected that jurisdictions that did not want it would remove at local adoption.

So I hope you approve this bill.

Sincerely,
Carl M Chretien

President
TPI #29
CEO #1044
LPI

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