



KENNEBUNKPORT FIRE DEPARTMENT

To: Housing and Economic Development (HED) committee
From: John Everett,
Fire Chief, Kennebunkport, Maine
Re: Testimony Against Passage of LD 659, as written

I would like to provide my opinion, along with some factual data, from my perspective in Kennebunkport, on the dangers of LD 659's enactment. While reducing costs is a worthwhile endeavor, it should not be done by reducing public safety. An important thing to remember is home sprinkler systems are designed for life safety only and not entire building protection. The systems give people the time to escape the burning home.

Since it seems the HED committee's focus is cutting housing costs, let's start there, since inception residential sprinkler systems have come way down in price for both engineering and installation. The newer connecting technologies and materials have reduced both material and installation costs immensely. Speaking to a couple plumbers in the area they would quote a perspective home builder \$2-\$3 per square foot to design and install a system. Possibly more if the system was outside of the normal size and type sprinkler they usually install. It is my understanding that insurance companies offer a discount for the homeowner's policy for a house that is sprinkled. While it may take a few years to recoup what was initially paid for the system, in the end the owner's expense for the system, whether they paid for the build or bought the home completed, is paid back and then some.

There are many studies out there that speak to how homes with residential sprinklers in them have less fatalities from fire than a home without sprinklers. According to NFPA's website a person is 88% less likely to be killed in a house fire with a residential sprinkler installed.

Some statistics from an NFPA article titled **U.S. Experience with Sprinklers**, written by Tucker McGree, dated April 2024 had this to say about residential sprinklers. The text highlighted in yellow is directly quoted from Mr. McGree's article.

"From 2017-2021 there were 23,675 home structure fires. These fires resulted in an annual average of 22 civilian deaths (1 percent of all home fire deaths), 550 civilian injuries (5 percent of all civilian home fire injuries) and \$249 million in direct property damage (3 percent of all property damage..."

"Sprinklers save lives and reduce injuries and property loss. From 2017 to 2021, the civilian death and injury rates in home structure fires where sprinklers were present were 89



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percent and 31 percent lower, respectively, than in home structure fires without a residential sprinkler system. In addition, the average property loss per home structure fire was 55% lower in reported home fires where sprinklers were present compared to fires in homes with no sprinkler systems and firefighter injury rate was 48 % lower.

In reported home structure fires where sprinklers were present, the fire was confined to the object or room of origin 96% of the time, compared to 72% in homes with no AES” (automatic extinguishing system)

As the fire chief I must put people in harm’s way sometimes, the 48% less injury rate to firefighters in residential sprinkled homes certainly helps. This is very evident in fire departments like Kennebunkport. Our department is a call company fire department, which means the members respond from home or work when there is a call. This increases our response time by an estimated 3-6 minutes since we do not have personnel in the stations.

Studies have shown that with the right amount of fuel, oxygen, and heat generated a fire can double in size every minute. The article quoted, showed that the fire was held to the room of origin in 96% of residential fires with a sprinkler present. Add that fact to our longer response time and to how fast a house fire can grow in a home without a sprinkler system, and I am putting my people into a much more dangerous situation.

The Bill, as written, seems to not only remove the ability to enact a residential sprinkler ordinance in a City or Town but also removes any sprinkler requirements that are already in place. In Kennebunkport, new sub-divisions that come before the planning board are going to be told that builders will need to install a residential sprinkler system in any sub-division outside of our pressurized hydrant system. The requirement is not townwide just in those parts of town with no water mains. These areas of town usually take much longer to set up a sustainable water supply as the water is drafted from rivers or fire ponds. These water sites are much farther apart than the hydrants in a pressurized hydrant area.

There are additional considerations that need to be looked at before a vote to remove this valuable tool as an option. These include but are not limited to,
Water damage – a sprinkler head will deliver approximately 4 to 15 gallons a minute based on pipe size and available pressure. The hoses we use to extinguish a fire inside a home will flow 120-150 gallons per minute. The sprinkler holds the fire in check and reduces water damage that reduces the insurance claim total. The home can be repaired and is not a tear down.



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Firefighter safety – without a long duration firefight because of the sprinkler, our firefighters are operating in the products of combustion for shorter periods of time. This reduces the exposure of our firefighters to known cancer causing chemicals in the smoke.

NFPA Life Safety Code – Requiring residential sprinkler systems in all new 1 and 2 family homes is not new, It has been part of the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code as written for many years. This code book, among others, is used to determine safety parameters for different type occupancies in both new and renovated constructions. Maine along with other states do not adopt the code as written, only certain sections are adopted. The residential sprinkler system requirement is unfortunately not in what Maine adopts.

Mutual Aid – In today's fire service we are counting on more mutual aid than ever before. As budgets are stretched more Cities and Towns are augmenting the crews they have with crews from neighboring departments. A fire held in check by the sprinkler system takes less personnel and resources from our mutual aid neighbors, freeing up resources that could be needed elsewhere.

Local control- Each City and Town should have the ability to decide the level of safety for their municipality, whether it is as strict as the State or more strict. If Kennebunkport can no longer require these systems in houses outside of the hydrant area, I feel lives will be in needless danger at the expense of few bucks.

For these reasons I hope this bill is scrapped. I think the data about residential sprinkler systems speaks for itself, in terms of safety to the citizenry and the firefighters that are going to respond. I also feel it is a slippery slope when you are looking at loosening safety restrictions to reduce costs, especially when these costs are recouped by the owner in lower insurance premiums.