



YARMOUTH

MAINE

Testimony in Opposition of LD 659

An Act to Reduce Housing Costs by Not Requiring Fire Sprinkler Systems for Single Family Homes and Duplexes

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of The Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Michael Robitaille, I am the Fire Chief for The Town of Yarmouth and stand here before you today in opposition of LD 659. I speak to you today as a forty-one (41) year veteran of the fire service who has responded to several hundred building fires in my career.

In 2021 the Town of Yarmouth adopted a Fire Sprinkler Ordinance, Fire Alarm Ordinance and a Life Safety Ordinance in our community based on best practices and what was right for our community. As subject matter experts for our community we approached the community and council who supported fire safety practices and risk reduction in our community.

Today, a special interest group once again comes before you and uses the thought process of Affordable Housing as their way of having you eliminate fire sprinkler protection in my community that I serve and protect. It is my job, as Fire Chief, to adamantly oppose such legislation. Local communities should be allowed to make their decisions and not be told what to do by the state; those communities know what's right for them and their citizens.

Sprinklers save lives and only account for 1-2% of all building costs. Yes, you will see an increase on the day you build the home, but the cost will be paid several times over by the reduction in annual insurance rates. The cost of a sprinkler, as you have heard, is around \$4 per square foot. Did the builders tell you that the average cost for a countertop is \$80 per square foot? Did they tell you that 29 victims died in 2023 and that 86% were in residences? Were you informed that fires flashover in approximately four (4) minutes due to the increased use of synthetics. This is before

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the fire department arrives and the only chance of survival is by self-escape or fire extinguishment by a home sprinkler.

On April 7, 2023, the Town of Yarmouth had a residential fire that was extinguished prior to the arrival of the fire department. The fire was contained by one single head that discharges approximately 12-15 gallons of water per minute. This fire was located 6.5 miles from our station and the response time was eighteen (18) minutes. The fire was extinguished and the home, valued at 2.8 million, was saved from destruction with the damage being less than \$25,000. One month later another fire was extinguished in our community, this time by a total of seven sprinkler heads which saved eight business and nearly 50 people their jobs. Sprinklers do make a difference, and they have had a positive effect in our community.

I take a different approach to sprinklers and their value in our community. They support our members, both volunteer and career, who respond day in and day out. Maine has a presumptive cancer act and a presumptive Post Traumatic Stress Act. Both of which I work hard on every day to prevent the claims from being filed. We have taken steps here in the legislature and in our own communities to reduce the chance of carcinogens coming into contact with our staff. This legislation will do just the opposite, and it will put our States firefighters one step closer to making a claim for cancer. Furthermore, our staff that respond to personal injury fires or worse fatalities are sure to file an exposure claim for Post Traumatic Stress. All of these claims will cost our communities more money through workers comp and insurance claims.

Yes, immediately this may reduce the housing cost by \$5,000 but it will also increase the cost of workers comp claims, payouts, and it will potentially be at the cost of a citizen or a firefighter. I urge you to consider the true affects of this legislation and support those who truly understand how no sprinklers will really affect the citizens of my community....This is a local issue that should be handled locally..

I want to thank you for your time, and I appreciate your willingness to hear me speak. The last twenty (20) years of my career have been spent in Yarmouth, a community that I understand and one that I have worked hard to make safe from fire and other hazards. In my forty-one (41) years of service the greatest day of my career was on August 19, 2021, when the Yarmouth Fire Sprinkler Ordinance was approved and our community became and staff became safer from the affects of fire.

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