



STATE OF MAINE
Department of Public Safety
Office of State Fire Marshal
52 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0052

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR
MICHAEL SAUSCHUCK
COMMISSIONER
SHAWN ESLER
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

February 25, 2025

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 honorable members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Shawn Esler, and I am honored to serve as the State's Fire Marshal.

I am writing today in **opposition** to LD 659. MUBEC, the National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code 101 and the National Fire Protection Association Fire Code currently require sprinkler systems in dwellings.

All three of these codes are adopted in the State of Maine, but by rule, one- and two-family dwellings are **exempt** under all three codes. However, there are approximately 20 municipalities across Maine that have ordinances to require single-family dwellings and duplexes be sprinkled, superseding State law in the locality.

Sprinkling single family dwellings is important because it significantly reduces the risk of fire-related fatalities and property damage by quickly containing a fire in its early stages, providing occupants with valuable escape time and limiting the spread of flames within the home; essentially acting as a life-saving safety feature that can potentially prevent major disasters.

Key points about home fire sprinklers:

- **Early fire detection:** Sprinklers activate rapidly when exposed to heat from a fire, which means they can begin extinguishing the flames almost immediately.
- **Localized water discharge:** Unlike a fire hose, sprinklers only activate in the immediate vicinity of the fire, minimizing water damage to the rest of the house.
- **Reduced property damage:** By quickly controlling a fire, sprinklers can significantly reduce the extent of structural damage and belongings lost.
- **Life safety focus:** The primary goal of residential sprinklers is to provide enough time for occupants to safely escape a fire, not necessarily to fully extinguish it.

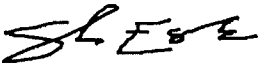
Today's housing materials are highly flammable. Thirty years ago, families had an estimated 17 minutes to escape a fire due to slow-burning materials inside the home, but today homes are manufactured from fast-burning, synthetic materials. That escape time is now less than 5 minutes.

In 2024, 19 people died in Maine from fire, 13 individuals died in their home. Nationally, 3,000 people die each year from fires, according to the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (HSFC). The HSFC also reports that installing both smoke alarms and fire sprinklers reduces the risk of death in a home fire by 82%, relative to having neither. For a fraction of a new home's total building cost, families can be protected from the life-threatening effects of fire and smoke. The average cost to install sprinklers in new homes is \$1.35 to \$4.00 per sprinklered square foot.

Communities should have the option to deploy preventive measures, like sprinklers, in congested housing areas or where loss of multiple housing units would have severe economic consequences.

With that said, the Fire Marshal's Office recognizes the need to limit barriers to housing. We understand a bill to study code requirements is on the horizon for this committee. There may be options that may increase the pace of housing production at the same time ensuring we protect the safety of Maine people. The Fire Marshal's Office supports that discussion and will offer up our technical experts to weigh in should you request it.

Thank you for your time.



Shawn Esler, State Fire Marshal