

IN SUPPORT OF THE
MELANIE DIAZ SPRINKLERS SAVE LIVES ACT

Joseph Tresh

Arrive resident, Apartment 721A, directly adjacent to the fire
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MARYLAND SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE

Dear Chair Brian Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and Members of the
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I urge you to support Senate Bill 970, the Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act. This bill will improve fire safety in high-rise buildings by requiring smoke alarms in public corridors, prohibiting landlords from charging deaf tenants for notification appliances, and requiring all high-rise buildings to have automatic sprinkler systems by January 1, 2033.

I awoke in my Arrive apartment 721A shortly before 6:00 am on the morning of February 18, 2023. It was quiet and dark morning, seemingly peaceful. The fire alarm wasn't sounding.

Soon after, I heard commotion coming from the hallway. I went to my door, looked through the peephole, and saw smoke in my hallway as I overheard my neighbors trying to fight a fire themselves. The fire alarm still wasn't sounding.

I opened my apartment door, entered the hallway, barely able to breathe as I opened the fire extinguisher compartment near my apartment. I did my best to scream to my neighbors that there was an extinguisher near me. I re-entered my apartment to alert my partner and prepare to escape the building. The fire alarm still wasn't sounding.

As we rushed to leave our apartment, our smoke alarm - only in our apartment - went off. I told my partner as soon as we leave we had to get it down on the ground and close the door behind us. We took a deep breath, opened the door to the hallway, and got below seven feet of black smoke to be able to see our escape route. The fire alarm still wasn't sounding.

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My partner and I crawled from our apartment door, through the hallway, past our neighbors and their burning apartment, finally to the exit staircase door. Even in that moment I was shocked and angry that the fire alarm still wasn't sounding.

We ran down one flight to the sixth floor where I pulled the fire alarm. In a couple of seconds the fire alarm started sounding.

What if I hadn't coincidentally been awake? What if I had slept long enough that the fire and the smoke would have been even more out of control? Why does it take an individual person to manually activate the fire alarm?

Why do developers buy buildings just to paint them in order to turn around and sell them again two years later? Why don't they invest in the safety of all of the residents?

The Arrive apartment building systems were working as intended, they tell us. Even if true, the system was a failure. Why can't we protect everyone? Melanie Diaz should not have been a victim of this terrible tragedy.

The arrive doesn't have sprinklers. The one connected smoke alarm on our apartment floor was about 175 feet away down three corridors from the burning apartment. Each corridor ceiling is separated by design features that trap smoke like a bulkhead. It's no wonder the fire alarm wasn't sounding.

It's clear that investors develop properties to the bare minimum as required by law. I urge you to consider it your responsibility to keep all Maryland renters safe. Senate Bill 970, the Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act is a reasonable and needed step to help bring fire safety equity to Marylanders.

Thank you for your time.

Joseph Tresh