

SB1292- SUPPORT
Marcelo Rojas
machy8921@gmail.com
Phone: 240-893-8383

**SB0970 Written Support
Fire Protection and Prevention-Sprinkler Systems and Smoke Alarms- Requirements
(Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act)**

*Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 15th, 2023*

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Marcelo Rojas and I am a student at University of Maryland College Park and a close friend Melanie Diaz. The purpose of this testimony is two-fold: (1) to introduce to you who Melanie was and (2) provide brief background behind her loss and how the lack of a single sprinkler and functional smoke detector system led to her passing.

(1)

Melanie N. Diaz was born in Coconut Creek, Florida. Her parents immigrated from Venezuela, and even though they were low-income, they believed in the power of education and hard work. **Melanie loved Disney movies, dressed up as princesses, and dreamed of saving the planet from the dangers of climate change.**

In high school, Melanie was a top student. She had a 4.0 cGPA. She was selected by the US State Department to study abroad in China. Also, she raised over \$80,000 for cancer research. **She chose to attend Georgetown University and was awarded a full academic scholarship and became known on campus for her kindness.** She interned at Office of the Surgeon General and at NASA, where she helped leverage satellite imaging during natural disasters to help organizations know where to provide relief/resources.

No one would know Melanie's many accomplishments if they stood next to her. She was humble and kind. She never allowed anyone to feel left out- she would bring them into the conversation or physically into the circle. She was so caring, that at times, people overlooked her. But still, she chose kindness, because **Melanie believed that "it's easy to become bitter. It's tougher to choose kindness in a cruel world."** And Melanie did. She chose to love everyone, especially the vulnerable.

During college, she met Michael Sobalvarro and began visiting Silver Spring, Maryland. **Despite the pandemic, Melanie graduated with a Bachelor's of Science in Culture & Politics in 2021.**

After graduation, she got her dream job working at Aspen Institute in downtown Washington DC, in the energy and environmental sector. She moved to the Arrive buildings and adopted the

joy of her life, a rescue puppy named Ella. Melanie and Michael would take their dogs for walks, study together, and had big dreams of a future together. Melanie chose to live in Maryland (Montgomery County) rather than returning to sunny Florida, because **Melanie felt that Maryland was a state where one could not only develop professionally, but grow a family with Michael.**

(2)

Melanie passed away on February 18th, she lived on the 11th floor and was found in the 9th-floor hallway. **Melanie was found hugging her two puppies and had taken off her jacket to protect them from the smoke- even in her last moments, she put others first.** They took her down to the ambulance where she no longer had a pulse. She passed away at 6:36 AM.

Hours afterwards, her boyfriend Michael went down the same staircase Melanie passed away.

On the 11th floor, he found her flashlight, connected to her keys, still turned on.

On the 10th floor, he found her dogs' pee pads in a bag and her NorthFace hat from college.

On the 7th floor, he found one of her Nike's shoes.

On the 6th floor, he found another shoe.

Everything was blackened from the soot.

Melanie's apartment DID NOT HAVE A SMOKE DETECTOR or SPRINKLER SYSTEM. The hallways of the complex do not have a smoke detector. The alarm had to be manually pulled down TWICE to activate. Despite this, Melanie did everything she was supposed to: she immediately harnessed her puppies, exited the apartment, and entered the nearest staircase.

The purpose of this bill is to prevent lives from being lost since nothing is being handled in the interim. A single sprinkler in the unit could have prevented the loss of my fiancé's life. A single hallway smoke detector could have activated the building's alarm system- instead of depending on a resident risking his life to pull down TWO alarms. **A home is not a home if it is not safe.**

I urge a favorable report on SB0970.

A picture of the lovely Ms. Melanie Diaz

