
Government of the District of Columbia



Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

Testimony of

Linda K. Argo
Director
on the

***“Fire Alarm Notice and Tenant Fire Safety
Amendment Act of 2009”***
Bill 18-178

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary
Phil Mendelson, Chair

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Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
11:00 A.M.

Good morning, Chairperson Mendelson, members, and staff of the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary. I am Linda Argo, Director of the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and with me is Don Masoero, the Department's Chief Building Inspector. We are here today to testify on Bill 18-178, the Fire Alarm Notice and Tenant Fire Safety Amendment Act of 2009.

The Department's fundamental mission is to protect the health, safety, economic interests, and quality of life of District of Columbia residents, businesses, and visitors by ensuring building and housing codes compliance and regulating businesses. DCRA meets this mission by issuing licenses and permits; conducting inspections; enforcing building, housing, and safety codes; regulating land use and development; and providing consumer education and advocacy services.

Bill 18-178 would amend the Smoke Detector Act of 1978, codified at D.C. Official Code § 6-751.01 et seq., to add several new provisions. Owners of buildings with at least two dwelling or rooming units would have to provide written notice of what to do in a fire emergency, compliant with the Language Access Act of 2004, to each tenant by first class mail and by posting the notice in common areas.

A sample form of the notice would be created by the Mayor. The notice would include instructions on operating a building fire alarm, whether the alarm is separate from the smoke detectors in individual units, a statement that the fire alarm is not necessarily connected to the Fire and EMS Department, and that in the event of a fire, residents should immediately call 911. Failure to post the notice would result in penalties ranging from \$100 to \$300 per violation.

Additionally, the owner or the owner's agent would be required to maintain a fire safety plan and conduct annual fire drills in each building with at least two units. I should note that this requirement differs slightly from the enacted emergency and temporary versions of this bill. The emergency and temporary laws require an annual fire drill in buildings with at least five units, rather than two.

Chairperson Mendelson, DCRA supports this bill. We believe the notice, fire safety plan, and annual fire drill requirements are beneficial to tenant safety.

We have published on our website, dcra.dc.gov, the following sample notice, as required by the emergency and temporary versions of this bill:

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF A FIRE EMERGENCY

Smoke detectors in individual units are NOT connected to this building's fire alarm system.

The interior fire alarm system in this building is NOT connected to the D.C. Fire and EMS Department. It is for evacuation purposes only.

In case of a fire emergency, activate the interior alarm station, following the instructions on the face of the alarm box, evacuate the building, and call 911. Do NOT use elevators during a fire emergency.

Remember that the smoke detectors in your unit or the fire alarm system in this building WILL NOT call the D.C. Fire and EMS Department.

IN ANY FIRE EMERGENCY, EVACUATE THE BUILDING AND CALL 911!

The notice was posted on our website in English and in Spanish. We also have shared the sample notice with both housing providers and housing advocates.

DCRA is strongly supportive of all efforts that increase housing safety. This bill will assist our efforts of ensuring safe, code-compliant conditions at all residential buildings.

Chairperson Mendelson, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to offer our views on this bill. Mr. Masoero and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.