



Housing Alliance
of Pennsylvania

March 22, 2010

An Open Letter to the General Assembly on Mandated Residential Sprinklers:

We commend you for connecting the quality of housing to the impact on human life, a value that we share and one which gets too little attention.

As you consider the requirement for sprinklers in all new homes built, I ask that you please take a moment and step back to look at the big picture.

Last year, in 2009, 85 Pennsylvanians died from involuntary homelessness (that we know of). That is more than TWICE the number of people who died in residential fires in the past 4 years combined.

If we are serious about saving lives, it seems to me that we should be thinking much more broadly than about compulsory sprinklers in new construction single family homes. We should be addressing the fact that too many Pennsylvanians don't have homes at all - or live in health-threatening conditions.

We have to question the amount of time and money being spent on this initiative while 17,000 Pennsylvanians suffer from involuntarily homelessness today. This is a problem on which the General Assembly has invested little attention.

Thousands more live in over-crowded, dangerous or substandard conditions. Yet Pennsylvania has no mandatory property maintenance code even though these dwellings are more likely to have lethal fires.

We are concerned about the disparate impact of the cost of a sprinkler on the developers of affordable homes when the evidence indicates that hard-wiring of smoke detectors in new construction homes is a much less costly an effective way to save lives.

In a time of extremely scarce resources, I ask you to please consider how we do the most good to improve the housing opportunities for the greatest number of people in the most cost effective manner.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth G. Hersh
Executive Director