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Representative Feigenholtz Files Homebuilder-Backed Bill Amendment That Would Strip Illinois State Fire Marshal of His Duties and Disregard a Century of Fire Safety Advancements

Orland Park, Ill. (March 24, 2014) — On March 24, State Representative Sara Feigenholtz filed an amendment to Illinois House Bill 4609 that would strip Illinois State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis' ability to adopt or enforce codes that include fire sprinklers requirements in any types of occupancies. Feigenholtz drafted the bill through support from the home builders and REALTORS associations in Illinois.

The amendment to HB4609 would effectively nullify the purpose of the state fire marshal, which is to adopt and enforce fire and building codes that protect residents and visitors statewide, says Tom Lia, fire safety advocate and executive director of the nonprofit Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board

"Feigenholtz's bill is irresponsible and would disregard the safety of the people of Illinois, putting them at risk of fires in all building types, whether residential, commercial or industrial," Lia declares. "In particular, it would allow home builders to regulate statewide fire safety standards in their own industry, rather than through the expertise of the Office of the State Fire Marshal and advisors from the state fire service."

In the aftermath of major fire catastrophes, codes and legislation have continually evolved to include fire sprinkler protection in certain types of buildings. Here in Illinois, those codes have evolved due lessons learned from fires such as the 603-fatality Iroquois Theater Fire of 1902, the 61-fatality La Salle Hotel Fire of 1946, the 95-fatality Our Lady of Angels School Fire of 1958, the fire destruction of McCormick Place in 1967, the 23-fatality Wincrest Nursing Home Fire of 1976, and the six-fatality Cook County Administration High-Rise Building Fire of 2003, among others. All those buildings now include fire sprinklers to protect them.

In fact, the national consensus model codes from both the National Fire Protection Association and International Code Council have fire sprinkler components as the majority of their featured fire protection provisions.

"There are over 100 fire sprinkler code trade-offs in the construction process that allow builders, developers and architects to build a more efficient and flexible building," notes Lia. "If you remove the fire sprinklers from the codes, all of the cost-saving trade-offs are lost as well."

"By removing the ability for our State Fire Marshal to adopt or update codes that include fire sprinkler protection in buildings, Illinois would be setting an inexcusable precedent that would result in lives lost to fires and would set the state decades, if not a century, back in fire safety advancement," states Lia.

About the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board

The Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB) is a Not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting progressive legislation, raising public awareness, and educating code officials and governmental policy makers by demonstrating the proven performance of fire sprinklers in saving both lives and property. For more info, visit www.firesprinklerassoc.org.

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