



May 12, 2020

The Honorable Todd Polinchock  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
House PO Box 202144  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2144

Dear Representative Polinchock:

We write in support of your bill HB 1236, which would require Pennsylvania landlords to provide 10-year tamper-resistant sealed smoke alarms in the dwelling units they rent out. The law would help protect families from home fires.

Smoke alarms are essential in every home fire escape plan. According to the National Fire Prevention Association, 3 out of 5 fire deaths occur in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.<sup>1</sup> Further, 25 percent of fires occur in homes where smoke alarms were present but did not operate because of dead batteries.<sup>2</sup> Having working smoke alarms in place can reduce the chances of dying in a fire by nearly 50 percent.<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation for fire deaths. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, 314 children between ages 0 to 14 died in a fire in 2017 throughout the nation.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, of 114 fire fatalities, 1 in 5 involved children 19 and under.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the alarming statistics, there's a human face on home fires. In April 2019, an apartment fire in Chester killed a father, Ralph Freeman, and his 8-year-old son James. It was a second alarm fire and the smoke was so dense that drivers had trouble seeing. His 4-year-old child was also in critical condition but survived. Firefighters said that there were no signs indicating that there was a smoke alarm. The rental housing was deficient in other ways and Mr. Freeman had told a neighbor he was planning to move.<sup>6</sup>

Safe Kids is a grassroots network of more than 400 coalitions across the country dedicated to preventing unintentional injuries among kids 19 and under, the number one killer of children in the United States. We work on a range of risk areas including car crashes, poisoning, drowning and fire safety hazards. Our presence is strong in Pennsylvania, with 12 coalitions. We thank you for your leadership in introducing HB 1236 and stand ready to support you and its passage.

Sincerely,

Safe Kids Pennsylvania  
Safe Kids Allegheny County  
Safe Kids Chester County

Safe Kids Lancaster County  
Safe Kids Southeastern Pennsylvania  
Safe Kids Worldwide

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Joshua Oyos, a Safe Kids Intern and student at NYU Abu Dhabi performed research in support of this letter of support.

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<sup>1</sup> National Fire Prevention Association. (2018). *Smoke Alarms at Home*. Available at: <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/FPW/Safety-tip-sheets/FPW19SmokeAlarms.ashx>

<sup>2</sup> National Fire Prevention Association. (January 2019). *Smoke Alarms in U.S. Home Fires*. Available at: <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Detection-and-Signaling/Smoke-Alarms-in-US-Home-Fires>

<sup>3</sup> Safe Kids Worldwide. *Fire Safety*. Available at: [https://www.safekids.org/safetytips/field\\_risks/fire](https://www.safekids.org/safetytips/field_risks/fire)

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Fire Administration. (2020). *U.S. fire deaths, fire death rates, and risk of dying in a fire*. Available at: [https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/statistics/fire\\_death\\_rates.html](https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/statistics/fire_death_rates.html)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Fire Administration. (2020). *Pennsylvania Fire Loss/Fire Department Profile*. Available at: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/statistics/states/pennsylvania.html>.

<sup>6</sup> WPVI-TV. (2019, April 7). *Father, son dead following Chester apartment fire, family says*. Available at: <https://6abc.com/5237358/>