

TO: Executive Matters and Legal Affairs Committee, Honolulu City Council

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RE: Bill 69 on fire safety

Aloha kakou,

I OPPOSE any requirement to retrofit existing high-rise condo buildings with fire sprinkler systems. Here are some reasons I ask you to consider carefully.

1. DOING A RETROFIT WOULD BE FAR MORE COSTLY THAN THE WATER PIPES ALONE.

1A: Apartments in most older buildings have "popcorn" ceilings, which are ASBESTOS. The asbestos is not harmful to residents because it is firmly attached to the ceiling and does not get disturbed under normal circumstances.

1A1: But installing sprinkler pipes would require the ceilings to be scraped to remove the asbestos -- a process that would require special HAZARDOUS MATERIALS procedures that are extremely expensive and can be done only by specially licensed companies.

1A2: During the asbestos removal, residents would be forced to LIVE IN A HOTEL, because many residents are elderly and do not have family or friends with whom they could "crash" on a couch.

1B: Condo owners must pay not only for their own apartment to be retrofitted, but also must pay for their proportionate share of retrofitting the COMMON ELEMENTS including office, manager's apartment, hallways, etc.

1C: FURNITURE MUST BE MOVED OUT to allow installers access to all areas of the ceilings. Elderly residents are unable to do the moving by themselves and will need to hire a moving company.

1D: Some condo associations have more than one building, including low-rise walkup units whose residents must nevertheless pay their proportionate share for elevators and for retrofitting the highrise with a sprinkler system.

2. A COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS BY ACTUARIES WILL SHOW THAT THE COST IS TOO HIGH (EVEN CONSIDERING THAT A LIFE MIGHT (RARELY) BE SAVED).

2A: Fire insurance companies should be asked to provide information about THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INSURANCE PREMIUMS FOR SPRINKLERED APARTMENTS VS. PREMIUMS FOR NON-SPRINKLERED APARTMENTS. That difference in premiums is an excellent measure of the actual savings in property damage which professional actuaries calculate would be saved per year by having sprinklers installed. I'm confident the savings totaled over the 30-40-year expected life of the sprinklers would be far less than the cost of installing and maintaining and periodically testing and re-certifying the system. I'm guessing that reduction in insurance premiums for apartments in sprinklered buildings is not much different from the miniscule premium reductions for having a smoke detector or burglar alarm.

2B: Insurance actuaries have a method of placing a monetary value on the life of a person, depending on age, life-expectancy, and expected earnings. Even when those valuations are added to the sum total of difference in fire insurance premiums, I'm confident the cost of the sprinkler system will be far too high.

3. PROTECTING AGAINST EXTREMELY RARE EVENTS is foolish

Fire is not the only danger that poses special risk of loss of life and property in high-rise condos. Another one is swaying caused by earthquake or strong winds. Tall buildings sway more than short ones. Swaying can cause weakening and collapse of the structure, killing not only every resident of the building but also people nearby.

Therefore city council should pass a law forcing high-rise buildings and every apartment inside to be retrofitted with additional steel beams and fasteners to maintain structural integrity in earthquakes up to 8.0 Richter and hurricanes up to 150 MPH; compliance to be certified by licensed civil engineers.

Dear reader, did you get my point? This comment #3 is a joke, to show the absurdity of forcing owners to retrofit to protect themselves and neighbors against extremely rare events.

Dear reader, consider your own decision whether to get expensive and painful medical tests to provide early detection for conditions that are extremely rare. How about inserting a tube with a tiny camera into a vein in your leg to travel all the way into your heart to look for narrowed blood vessels or plaque or aneurisms, even though you have no symptoms or other tests indicating a need for it? You never know; it might happen to you! Let's force everybody to get those preventive tests!

Dear reader: What makes a highrise building different from a walkup apartment building or a house? Why are you not including all apartment buildings and freestanding houses in your legislation? HAVE YOU PERSONALLY RETROFITTED YOUR OWN HOUSE WITH A SPRINKLER SYSTEM? WHY NOT? Then don't make me do what you have decided not to do.

4. In the 20 years I have lived in my 41-year-old building there were two fires in my 13-story-high-rise condo building, on upper floors, which destroyed the apartments but were extinguished by fire department. Those fires did NOT SPREAD to other apartments, despite the building having NO SPRINKLER SYSTEM. Some buildings (like mine) are constructed with exterior walls made of concrete blocks, and with cement floors/ceilings, and interior walls between apartments made of fire-resistant materials.

5. Please respect the rights of people to make their own decisions. Do not force expensive measures down their throats which they vehemently oppose. I believe it is true that NO OLDER HIGHRISE CONDO ASSOCIATION HAS EVER CHOSEN TO RETROFIT FOR A SPRINKLER SYSTEM, despite massive propaganda in the media whenever there's a highrise fire. All those condo associations have made their decisions repeatedly, for decades. Respect them!