

# Public Housing Fire Safety Act of 2019

## Senator Tina Smith (D-MN) and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

Automatic fire sprinkler systems are widely recognized as an essential element of fire safety. Properly installed sprinklers respond to fires before the heat, flames, and smoke spread throughout the building. Therefore, the rate of death as a result of home fires is 81 percent lower in homes with sprinklers.<sup>1</sup> The Federal Fire Safety Act of 1992 required the installation of sprinklers in all new government-owned high rise buildings. However, there are thousands of public housing apartment buildings around the country built before that date. According to data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for example, nearly all of the high-rise public housing buildings in Minneapolis, Minnesota were built before the mandatory sprinkler system laws took effect.<sup>2</sup>

One of these properties, Cedar High Apartments, suffered a tragic and fatal fire in November 2019. The upper floors of the building, where the fire erupted, did not have sprinkler systems installed. Public housing authorities that wish to retrofit older buildings like Cedar High Apartments with sprinkler systems must use their already limited capital funds to do so. While many public housing authorities have recognized the importance of these upgrades, the federal government must take a larger role in supporting fire safety improvements.

The *Public Housing Fire Safety Act* would encourage public housing authorities to install sprinkler systems in older buildings, improving the safety of residents and local communities.

### Specifically, the bill would:

1. Create a competitive grant program in the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide funds to public housing authorities who wish to retrofit older high-rise apartment buildings with sprinkler systems.
2. Collect data on the status of sprinkler installations in public housing high-rises around the country.

**Endorsing organizations include:** International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), National Fire Sprinkler Association, Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA), National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), Minnesota NAHRO, National Low Income Housing Coalition, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, National Housing Law Project, and the Congressional Fire Services Institute

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Suppression/US-Experience-with-Sprinklers>

<sup>2</sup> [http://hudgis-hud.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/public-housing-buildings?selectedAttribute=TOTAL\\_DWELLING\\_UNITS](http://hudgis-hud.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/public-housing-buildings?selectedAttribute=TOTAL_DWELLING_UNITS)