



Mid Atlantic Chapter of the AFSA

*Serving Pennsylvania and Delaware based
Fire Sprinkler Professionals
as a Training Resource & Discussion Forum*

Chairmen Vulakovich, Barrar, Costa, and Sainato – and members of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

In Pennsylvania you need a license to braid hair, to teach someone how to braid hair, paint nails, to teach someone how to paint nails, to be an apprentice in cosmetology, operate a crane, sell a car, be a massage therapist, go hunting and fishing, but you do not need a license to install or maintain a life safety system.

My name is Meaghen Wills and today I am representing the American Fire Sprinkler Association (AFSA). I have been in the fire sprinkler industry for fifteen years. I am a member of the American Society of Certified Engineering Technicians (ASCET), I hold a NICET level II certification from the National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technologies (NICET) in Water-Based Systems Layout and I am active in the American Fire Sprinkler Association locally and nationally. AFSA is actively working with several other states on contractor licensing and working with our counterparts at the National Fire Sprinkler Association on other legislative issues such as home fire sprinklers. Collectively, we represent the majority of the fire sprinkler contractors in Pennsylvania and our organizations are in agreement that SB1178 with special attention to the subsection for fire sprinkler contractors is an absolute necessity for the safety of the Commonwealth.

Today I would like to express the importance of passing the amended version of SB1178. We support fire sprinkler contractor licensing in lieu of fitter licensing as fire sprinkler contractors operate differently and face different challenges than what the contractors affiliated with NAFED face. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania needs to act now.

As our industry continues to grow we are seeing a number of contractors, engineers and other fire protection professionals that have a lack of education that is vitally important to what we do every day. Let me explain to you why this is so important by explaining to you how a fire protection contracting company operates.

Staff is made up of office employees and field employees. The field employees are responsible for installing the pipe that is designed and fabricated per the specifications of the designer. The knowledge that's needed comes from our office staff of NICET certified designers. It's the responsibility of the designer to provide the correct information for the field crews to install our systems correctly. Any issues that arise are reported back to the design staff in the office for changes. The real knowledge of our industry is with the design staff. They are responsible for knowing the codes and insuring that all of the correct information is relayed to where it needs to go.

The fire sprinkler industry is unique from the world of fire extinguishers, hood systems, and fire alarm systems. Our field crews are not considered “technicians”. There is no exam or test or certification available to them to test their knowledge. That is in place for designers. NICET certifies designers on a level 1 through 4 system. The test is intended to test a designer’s knowledge of NFPA 13, 14, and 24, the most commonly used codes in the fire sprinkler industry. We do believe that it is vital that contractors are proficient in their knowledge as we are protecting lives and property. We design and install to a complex code and having a Responsible Managing Employee (RME) on staff will help to alleviate uneducated contractors. With that said, we support SB1178 but with a subsection for fire sprinkler contractors.

The other concern that needs to be discussed today is the current trend that we are seeing in the local municipalities passing Responsible Contractor Ordinances (RCO). Sometimes an RCO can be used as a Project Labor Agreement. The inconsistency between the RCOs creates additional challenges for contractors open shop and union, big and small. We need to alleviate the headaches of every municipality having different rules to abide by. Uniformity across the state helps everyone save time and money.

The time is now for contractor licensing. We need to join the other ?? states in the country that have licensing in place. Something needs to be passed to allow for a fair and equal opportunity for every contractor in our state. The time is now to ensure that each and every contractor has a Responsible Managing Employee in place to make certain that contractors are staying educated and installing and maintaining life safety systems to code.