



## AMERICAN WOOD COUNCIL

February 21, 2017

Senator Joan Carter Conway, Chair  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: AWC Opposition to Maryland SB 722

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill. Please refer to our formal written testimony that was previously submitted regarding this bill.

We oppose any legislative effort that affects technical aspects and interpretations of the nationally adopted building codes. This process is routinely pursued by engineers, the fire service, building code officials, architects, and construction material representatives. This system has worked for well over fifteen years, is driven by members of the International Code Council, receives regular public input, and is vetted by proponents vigorously defending their proposals in a broadcasted public forum.

Fortunately for us all, both building occupants and firefighter death statistics continue to fall. While even one death is too many, the current building code, and its successor codes show that the focus on life safety is correct. With continued code development and building professional involvement, buildings will become even safer. The code as written does not discriminate against any specific building material. Rather it mandates that the material must perform to a uniform standard to achieve a clear fire resistance rating. No building material is immune from the damaging effects of fire. The code identifies risk and correlates permissible building materials to safely address those risks.

The proposed legislation creates an unfair market advantage for non-wood products, creates a conflict with the adopted Maryland building codes, and will require the expenditure of considerably more embodied energy, with non-renewable and unsustainable raw materials. This is why wood and materials that use low embodied energy are specifically called out in the recently adopted Int'l Green Construction Code which was adopted by the State of Maryland. Adoption of this legislation will place this bill in direct conflict with the adopted building code in Maryland.

Regarding construction fires, the AWC has addressed this threat by producing three (3) manuals and an online website to inform developers, code officials, and the fire service, about best management practices that reduce and prevent construction fires.

The requirement of placarding of so called "light framed construction", equates to

an unfunded mandate that will not increase fire fighter safety. Who will document and track the installation of these placards and keep records of their installation? Firefighters are very well trained and unless forced to enter a burning structure to search for victims, stay outside buildings and fight fires from the exterior. If placards are missing, broken, or if a building does not have a placard, what then? Any burning building can have its structural framing compromised in short order by the severe heat and flames associated with modern manmade room contents.

In summary, AWC supports the long established, multi-stakeholder involved, code development process provided by the International Code Council. Code development, research, rigorous third-party testing, public hearings, and input from code officials, fire officials, design professionals, and industry should dictate the direction of the codes, not legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew M. Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Matthew M. Hunter, BCO  
Northeast Regional Manager  
American Wood Council  
Email: [mhunter@awc.org](mailto:mhunter@awc.org)