



---

Testimony of Dr. Katie Donnelly MD, MPH, Medical Director Safe Kids DC

Bill 51-20, Landlord-Tenant Relations-Window Guards

January 12, 2020

Good morning President Hucker and the members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Katie Donnelly and I am a practicing emergency medicine physician at Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC. Children's National Hospital is the trauma center for children in this region, including Montgomery County, that treats approximately 120,000 children per year. I also am the Medical Director for Safe Kids DC, an organization dedicated to decreasing accidental childhood injury in the District, Maryland and Virginia. I am speaking to you today both in my role as an emergency medicine doctor and as an injury prevention specialist and researcher.

I am here today to express my strong support for Bill 51-20, Landlord-Tenant Relations-Window Guards. As a pediatric emergency provider, I have seen firsthand the damage a fall from a window can do to a child. From broken bones to head injuries to intra-abdominal bleeding, these injuries can be life threatening and life altering. It is heartbreaking to have to tell a mother that her child has died needlessly from a fall. These injuries are entirely preventable with simple window guards and stops. Window guards are affordable, available and easy to install as the landlord.



---

Pediatric window falls, meaning children falling large distances out of building windows, are a preventable cause of childhood injury and death. In the past year we have seen pediatric window falls treated at Children's National Hospital double. We have seen window falls from Montgomery County double as well. Many of these falls were from building heights of two to four stories. We have also, tragically, had two fatalities in 2020, one from Montgomery County. This recent number of deaths from window falls is unheard of for our area, and these deaths are preventable. I commend the Council for acting now to intervene.

Children fall out of windows due to a combination of factors. One, they are naturally curious and will investigate and play with anything they can. Families underestimate a child's ability to access windows through climbing on or moving nearby furniture. Two, parents place too much faith in window screens, thinking they will keep their children safe from falls. Window screens are meant to keep bugs out, not children in. Three, families just generally don't think of windows as a threat to the safety of their children.

For these reasons, Children's National and Safe Kids DC strongly support the legislation proposed by the Council. A similar law that mandated landlords in an urban setting supply window guards for any family with children under the age of 10 was able to reduce pediatric window falls by 96%, thus saving lives. We also support the inclusion of any window above the ground floor as we know that children fall out of second and third story windows frequently. The death of a toddler last year in Montgomery County was from only a third story window. This legislation can prevent unnecessary injuries and deaths in children from window falls.

---





---

We thank the Council for its dedication to the safety and well-being of children in Montgomery County. We have full faith that this legislation will pass and will allow for a brighter and safer future for the children of Montgomery County. We look forward to continuing to work with the Council on pediatric injury prevention in the future. I am happy to answer any questions you might have about my testimony.

