

## Montgomery

## County Council

##### *From the Office of Councilmember Tom Hucker* *July 16, 2019*

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**Transportation and Environment Committee Chair Tom Hucker introduces bill to require air conditioning for all rental units located in Montgomery County**

*New bill part of Hucker’s ongoing efforts to improve living conditions for renters*

ROCKVILLE, Md., July 16, 2019—Today the Montgomery County Council introduced Bill 24-19, Landlord – Tenant Relations – Obligations of Landlord – Air Conditioning, that would improve living conditions for renters across Montgomery County. Councilmember Tom Hucker, who serves as chair of the Transportation and Environment Committee, is the lead sponsor of Bill 24-19 that would require a landlord to provide and maintain air conditioning service for rental housing located in the County.  Councilmember Will Jawando is a cosponsor of Bill 24-19.

“Extreme heat can be just as deadly to vulnerable residents as extreme cold,” Hucker said. “Yet, the County Code only has a limit on how cold an apartment can get. As climate change worsens, we are going to see hotter days for longer periods of time, so it will be more important than ever that tenants have access to a safe and cool environment.”

Many residents who rent older and more affordable housing units do not have access to consistent air conditioning.  This new bill requires individual air conditioning units, or a central air conditioning system, be maintained in good working order to provide an inside temperature of eighty degrees or less from May 1 through Sept. 30 each year.  Currently County law requires that each rental unit be able to maintain a minimum temperature of 68 degrees but doesn’t mandate a maximum temperature.

“My apartment building suffered from chronic loss of air conditioning during the hottest months of the year,” said Tasha Harris, a renter and former tenant association president in Kensington. “Air conditioning systems were out of service for weeks while residents suffered in their apartments in dangerously high temperatures threatening the health and quality of life of all of our residents, especially seniors, the disabled and children. Several seniors needed to be hospitalized from heat exhaustion while management repeatedly defended their neglect and delayed repairs. On two occasions, ordered by the County, air conditioning was temporarily restored with outside generators.”

If a landlord does not comply with the new law tenants may file a complaint with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the landlord may face a fine of $500.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 600 people die every year nationwide from heat-related illnesses.  Last year in Montgomery County, approximately 800 cases of heat-related illnesses were reported from May 22 through Sept. 17.

Bill 24-19 is part of Hucker’s ongoing efforts to improve the quality of life for renters across the County.  In June the Council unanimously enacted Bill 6-19, Landlord – Tenant Relations – Termination of Lease – Tenant Health, which was also sponsored by Hucker.  This bill requires each lease for rental housing in the County to allow the tenant to terminate the lease, if the landlord doesn’t correct conditions that impact the immediate health and safety of a tenant in a tenant’s unit or in a common area within 30 days.

“Tenants deserve quiet, quality, comfortable and healthy places to live,” said Matt Losak, executive director of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance. “We are grateful for Councilmember Hucker's attention to air conditioning standards as temperatures continue to rise alongside the increasing population of renters in our county, especially senior renters.  This legislation is long overdue.”

A public hearing on Bill 24-19 is scheduled for September 10 at 1:30 p.m. Watch video of Councilmember Hucker’s remarks on Bill 24-19: <https://youtu.be/V5eh7TTru8Y> . The Council staff report can be viewed at:<https://tinyurl.com/HuckerACBill> .