



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Chief James Wallace, Baltimore City Fire Chief, Baltimore City Fire Department
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	August 26, 2025
SUBJECT	25-0062 Building Code – Single Exit from Residential Occupancy

Position: Support with Amendments

BILL SYNOPSIS

This bill allows for certain residential buildings to have a single exit or access to a four single exit, so long as certain conditions are met regarding the construction of the exit.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

The Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) supports the intent of this bill. A single stair access building can offer significant advantages for development, particularly in Baltimore City, where housing demand, space constraints, and construction costs continue impact the city. This type of building design provides a unique opportunity to maximize efficiency in construction and use of space, allowing more of a building's square footage to be dedicated to actual residential units rather than space for additional stairwells and hallways. For Baltimore, where many neighborhoods include narrow or irregularly shaped lots, especially in older parts of the city, this approach to building design can help develop better underutilized or difficult-to-develop areas of land.

Encouraging the development of single stair access buildings can also promote the creation of more affordable and diverse housing types by lowering construction costs and improving design flexibility. This aligns with broader city goals to increase housing supply, create more options for residents at different income levels, and support development in established neighborhoods without dramatically altering the existing community.

However, it is imperative that fire safety and accessibility requirements be carefully considered and thoroughly addressed when discussing the use and implementation of single stair access buildings. Life safety must remain a top priority, and the BCFD emphasizes the need for clear code compliance, well-defined egress routes, and adequate fire protection systems in any building approved under this model. While this bill presents promising opportunities, the success of this building type in Baltimore will depend on a balance between development innovation and

public safety.

FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has no fiscal impact on BCFD.

AMENDMENTS

Every building using this single-stair design must have a full sprinkler system installed throughout the entire structure. This includes not just living spaces but also areas that are hidden or made of combustible materials, such as attics, roof cavities, and the spaces between floors. These areas must be protected with sprinklers, and draftstopping (which blocks the spread of fire) cannot be used as a substitute.

The stairway that people use to exit the building in case of emergency can either be located inside or outside. If it's inside, it must be enclosed in fire-rated walls that can resist fire for two hours, and the doors must also be fire-rated for 90 minutes. This is consistent with national fire safety standards and helps ensure that the exit remains safe during a fire.

Finally, the layout of the building must include a corridor that separates the door of each apartment from the stairwell. This means no apartment door can open directly into the stairwell. These corridors must also be built with walls that can resist fire for two hours. This added protection allows the building to meet fire safety requirements without needing to have a separate emergency rescue window in each bedroom.