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BILL: House Bill 226  
TITLE: Public Schools – Sprinkler Systems - Required  
DATE: February 6, 2018  
POSITION: OPPOSE  
COMMITTEE: Appropriations  
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House Bill 226 requires that a sprinkler system that meets certain requirements be installed in each public school building in the State; and providing for the application of certain provisions of law.

PSSAM respectfully **opposes** House Bill 226.

Local superintendents understand the intent of this legislation, but we must **oppose** House Bill 266 as an unfunded mandate. It is estimated that it will cost local school systems \$495 million in FY 2019 to retrofit an estimated 330 public school facilities that do not have sprinkler systems. State funding will be provided. Local school systems are struggling to meet the fiscal needs of our students and we simply cannot handle additional expenses of this magnitude.

However, we want to make it perfectly clear that the safety of all students and other school-based staff in school buildings is one of our top priorities. The original intent of sprinkler systems in school settings is to protect the property within the building, not as a primary protection for the occupants of the building. Therefore, in terms of student safety and staff safety, there are other safety measures in place for that purpose.

Local school systems strictly adhere to rigid local, state, and federal guidelines. For schools that are fully protected by automatic fire sprinklers, **five** fire evacuation drills are required during the school year, two of which must be conducted during the first four months of school. For schools that are not fully protected by automatic fire sprinklers, **eight** fire evacuation drills are required, with at least three during the first four months of school. As an example of detailed focus on this issue, Montgomery County Public Schools publishes an 11-page fire safety document on their website for public review.

In addition, from a fiscal standpoint, current fire codes do not require a school system to install sprinklers in buildings that were constructed without them. They are required in all new buildings and renovated buildings. It would not make fiscal sense to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to install sprinkler systems in older buildings without them, only to turn around and spend millions of dollars more renovating or replacing those buildings.

In conclusion, we again reiterate that the safety of all school-based staff is our primary concern. However, without state funding, PSSAM must **oppose** Senate Bill 226 as an unfunded mandate and we urge an unfavorable committee report.