

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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Governor's Housing Agenda Poses Risk for Fire Service

In his combined State of the State and Budget address on February 18, 2026, Governor JB Pritzker focused on affordable housing as one of the issues he wants to tackle this spring. While the goals of increasing access to housing are laudable, some of the details in his proposal have raised concerns within the fire service.

In promoting his Building Up Illinois Developments or BUILD Plan, Pritzker cited a study by the Illinois Economic Policy Institute and the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois Champaign Urbana that showed that Illinois is currently short 142,000 housing units and will need an additional 227,000 homes by 2030. While the housing crisis is a national issue, data reflects that Illinois has seen slower growth than other states following the COVID-19 pandemic, something Pritzker aims to fix with the BUILD plan.

The governor proposes to encourage housing development by reducing red tape. This is where the definition of "red tape" becomes problematic because some of his housing agenda conflicts with regulations that ensure fire safety. Senate Bill 4061 sponsored by Senator Sara Feigenholtz (D-6, Chicago) and House Bill 5626 sponsored by Representative Kam Buckner (D-26, Chicago) provide that, beginning January 1, 2027, no building code adopted by a county or municipality may prohibit residential buildings from having a single stairway serving as an exit for all units if the building meets certain other fire safety conditions. These bills would effectively increase the current

code requirement of a single stairway for up to three stories to six stories.

The International Code Council and the National Fire Protection Association require multiple means of egress for buildings above three stories. This requirement is supported by research that shows that reducing means of egress pose risks for both first responders and building occupants. Allowing for increased single-stairway development also fails to recognize that not every fire department will be equipped to respond to an emergency in buildings over three stories.

Another bill proposed by the Governor would allow for accessory dwelling units or ADUs. Often referred to as "granny flats", House Bill 5626 and companion Senate Bill 4017 sponsored by Senator Robert Martwick (D-10, Chicago) would require municipalities to allow for the construction of ADUs including backyard cottages, above-garage apartments and attached secondary units without additional restrictions from those required for single family homes. Under the provisions of these bills, up to eight accessory structures could be built on a 7,501 square foot lot. Accessory dwelling units are currently subject to greater review than single-family homes, particularly in the city of Chicago.

The ADU proposal like single-stairway does not meet International Code Council recommendations for fire separation and access requirements and could result in fire spread risks. Members of the fire service including the AFFI, the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association and the Illinois

Municipal League have been actively lobbying against these two proposals in the governor's BUILD initiative and several members of IFCA and IAFPD spoke with legislators regarding these bills during our March legislative day.

Fortunately, many municipalities have joined the fire service in raising questions about ADUs and single-stairway configurations. After the Governor gave his address in February, mayors of Peoria, Rockford and South Barrington spoke with the Chicago Tribune about their concerns. Even members of the Chicago City Council have spoken against relaxing restrictions on ADUs despite support from the Mayor of Chicago and the Governor.

Whether the administration can overcome the resistance to these bills will play out in the final weeks of the legislative session. IAFPD stands with our fire service partners in supporting ICC/NFPA consensus-based code requirements and the ability of local authorities to uphold these codes within their city limits for the safety of fire fighters and residents. We echo the statement by the IFCA that safety must never be sacrificed in exchange for development convenience and cost reduction. ■