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(Sent via email)

Dear Dame Judith,

London Assembly Planning Committee report – *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step towards safer homes*

I would like to start by paying my deepest respects to the victims of fires across the UK, most notably the 71 people killed in the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017. I am sure you share my conviction that such a fire must never happen again. This will need bold and urgent action from the Government and other authorities.

The Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety is a crucial part of this. I was very interested to read your timely interim report, *Building a Safer Future*, which treats fire safety with the urgency and attention it deserves. I agree with you that “the current regulatory system for ensuring fire safety in high-rise and complex buildings is not fit for purpose”.¹ I was particularly pleased to read that respondents to your review highlighted the fire safety benefits of sprinklers and the need for them to be installed in new buildings.

The time is right to take the next step in fire safety and ensure AFSS are fitted more widely in residential buildings. Attached to this letter you will find a copy of the report, *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step towards safer homes*. The report is the final outcome of a review I led on behalf of the London Assembly's Planning Committee into the effectiveness and economic viability of requiring automatic fire suppression systems (AFSS) in London's buildings. The review included extensive evidence gathering over six months, including two roundtables with invited experts, a call for evidence, stakeholder meetings and four site visits to see AFSS installations.

Our report argues that AFSS represent the next step in fire safety. In *Building a Safer Future* you note the need to demonstrate “that there are sufficient layers of protection to ensure that building safety does not rely heavily on compartmentation”.² AFSS can act as an additional layer of fire protection where passive fire safety measures, such as fire doors, fail. AFSS can promote building resilience against fire, prevent fire from spreading and allow it to be brought more quickly back into use. We recommend that the Building Regulations better reflect the step change that AFSS can offer in promoting building resilience as well as in saving lives.

¹ Hackitt, J., [Building a Safer Future, Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Interim Report](#), December 2017, page 9

² Hackitt, J., [Building a Safer Future, Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Interim Report](#), December 2017, page 23, paragraph 1.86

Although AFSS represent the next step in fire safety, they are not mandatory in residential buildings below 30 metres high in England. On the basis of the evidence we have gathered we recommend that the Government, Mayor and the fire and AFSS industries work together to produce a road map towards requiring AFSS in every new residential building in England. The road map should include clear milestones for bringing in changes to the Building Regulations, based on an assessment of risk for different types of residential development, the capacity of the market and the installation skills in the labour force.

We are calling for a phased road map since, as you recognise in *Building a Safer Future*, “the rules for ensuring high-rise and other complex buildings are built safe and remain safe should be more risk-based and proportionate”.³ A very important first step will be to require AFSS in all residential buildings over 18 metres – 6 floors – high in England. AFSS should also be fitted where there are higher risks to vulnerable people, including in all new and existing care homes and sheltered housing. The Government should also require AFSS to be fitted where feasible during refurbishment work where ‘consequential improvements’ are made.

We accept that it is not immediately feasible for AFSS to be retrofitted in every existing building. Retrofitting in those buildings over 30 metres high in London alone could cost up to £500 million. There is no public funding available to meet these costs and freeholders, leaseholders and tenants cannot be expected to pay the full amount. That is why we are recommending that the Mayor develops a new risk-based £50 million ‘London Sprinkler Retrofitting Fund’. The primary goal of this £50 million fund should be to enable housing providers to fit AFSS where their residents are most vulnerable to fire and there are extra cost constraints.

The evidence we have gathered clearly demonstrate that AFSS are the next step in fire safety. Your review envisages more rigorous and robust Building Regulations that work to ensure that residents are safe from fire. AFSS act both as a last-resort defence against fire before the fire brigade arrive and as a mechanism for preventing the spread of fire in its earliest stages, protecting residents, property and local communities. I hope that you will take on board the findings in our report when considering your final recommendations to Government.

If you wish to respond to our report, or would like further information, please contact Reece Harris, Assistant Scrutiny Manager at reece.harris@london.gov.uk.

I look forward to reading your final response to Government.

Yours sincerely,



Navin Shan AM

Rapporteur for the London Assembly Planning Committee

CC: The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

³ Hackitt, J., [Building a Safer Future, Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Interim Report](#), December 2017, page 9