

**NOTICE TO LANDLORDS: BELOW-GRADE (BASEMENT) BEDROOM COMPLIANCE
International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) Guidelines**

DATE: May 8, 2025

To: All Residential Property Owners, Landlords and Agents

From: Cheverly Office of Code Compliance

Subject: Compliance Requirements for Below-Grade Bedrooms Under IPMC

Dear Property Owner/Landlord/Agent,

This notice serves as a reminder and advisory regarding the use of **below-grade (basement) spaces as sleeping rooms** in rental properties, as governed by the **International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC)** and applicable town and county housing codes.

Key Requirements for Below-Grade Bedrooms:

According to the **IPMC Section 404 – Occupancy Limitations**, a basement room used as a bedroom must **meet the following minimum criteria:**

Egress Requirements (Section 702.4):

- Every sleeping room must have at least **one operable emergency escape and rescue opening** (e.g., egress window or door) that opens directly to the outside.
- Emergency escape and rescue openings **shall be operational from the inside of the room without the use of keys or tools.**
- **The window must meet the following minimum dimensions:**
 - **Maximum sill height: 44 inches above the finished floor**
 - **Net clear opening area: At least 5.0 square feet (for grade-level or below-grade openings)**
 - **Minimum opening height: 24 inches**
 - **Minimum opening width: 20 inches**

◆ “Net clear opening” refers to the actual openable space when the window is fully opened—not the overall size of the window frame.

◆ **Note:** Meeting the minimum height and width does not automatically satisfy the 5.0 sq. ft. requirement. The Net clear opening must meet all three criteria—height, width, and area—to be compliant.

(See Chart Below)

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|-----------------|----|------|------|------|----|------|------|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|
| Width (inches) | 20 | 20.5 | 21 | 21.5 | 22 | 22.5 | 23 | 23.5 | 24 | 24.5 | 25 | 25.5 | 26 | 26.5 | 27 | 27.5 | 28 | 28.5 | 29 | 29.5 | 30 |
| Height (inches) | 36 | 35.5 | 34.5 | 33.5 | 33 | 32 | 31.5 | 31 | 30 | 29.5 | 29 | 28.5 | 28 | 27.5 | 27 | 26.5 | 26 | 25.5 | 25 | 24.5 | 24 |

- **Window Wells (for below-grade openings):**
 - Must provide a minimum horizontal area of 9 square feet (at least 36 inches in both directions)
 - A permanent ladder or steps is required if the window well depth exceeds 44 inches
- **Bulkhead Enclosures (Walk-Out Basement Doors):**
 - Must be readily openable from the inside
 - Must not require keys, tools, or special knowledge to open

Ceiling Height (Section 404.3)

- Minimum ceiling height must be 7 feet throughout the room.
 - Local amendments may allow a reduced height of 6 feet 8 inches under ducts or beams (check with local officials).
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Natural Light and Ventilation (Section 402)

- Room must contain a window for natural light.
 - Glazed area (window glass) must equal at least 8% of the room's floor area.
 - Ventilation (via window or mechanical means) must provide at least 4% of the floor area.
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Heating Requirements (Section 602)

- Room must be capable of maintaining a minimum indoor temperature of 68°F (20°C) during required heating periods.
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Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detection (Sections 605 & 704)

- **Smoke detectors are required:**
 - Inside each bedroom
 - In the immediate vicinity outside the bedroom
- **Carbon monoxide detectors are required if the unit contains:**
 - Fuel-burning appliances, or
 - An attached garage

◆ Maryland Smoke Alarm Law Requirement:

In accordance with Maryland law, battery-operated smoke alarms must be the sealed 10-year long-life battery type with a hush (silence) feature. This applies to properties where hardwired smoke alarms are not already required by code. Devices that allow battery replacement are no longer compliant under this law.

Moisture and Water Intrusion (Sections 305, 306, 308)

- The space must be free of chronic dampness, water intrusion, visible mold, and pest infestation.
 - All structural components must be sound and secure.
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Minimum Room Dimensions (Section 404)

- The room must have a minimum area of 70 square feet
 - No interior dimension may be less than 7 feet
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What You Must Do:

- **Inspect** your basement bedrooms to ensure full compliance with the above standards.
- **Discontinue renting** (or permitting the use of) any non-compliant below-grade bedrooms until appropriate corrections are made.
- **Apply for permits** where needed for modifications, including egress window installations or structural alterations.

Failure to comply may result in **finances, enforcement action, or revocation of rental licenses.**

We urge you to be proactive in addressing these requirements to ensure tenant safety and avoid potential penalties.

If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact me at 240.770.7647.

Sincerely,



CEO J.C. O'Berry #1631
Code Compliance Officer