

Testimony of Kristen Ann Record
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2011 Connecticut Teacher of the Year
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Before the Public Health Committee
Re: HB 5431, An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools
March 9, 2020

Good afternoon, Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Kristen Record. I am a resident of Bridgeport and have taught Physics at Bunnell High School in Stratford for the past 20 years. I am the Stratford Education Association Vice President for Secondary Schools, and I am the 2011 Connecticut Teacher of the Year.

For me, as a teacher, the end of August always brings its familiar back-to-school routines. By September, we are in full swing, and another predictable thing comes along in my life – seasonal allergies. A few years ago, however, I had the unfortunate experience of having my classroom flooded during a heavy summer rain storm. Everything had to come out of my room that summer—literally everything—including the carpet in the room. It was a huge mess, but luckily everything was back in place by the start of school. But then something odd happened to me when school opened back up: no fall allergies. Imagine my shock as I slowly realized it wasn't me who was sick – it was my classroom. And if my room, with its 20+-year-old carpet was sick, probably every other room with that same carpeting was too. But I was the only one lucky enough to get it replaced.

More than two-thirds of the classrooms in my high school had that same carpeting, and the more investigating I did, the more disturbed I became. Through conversations and surveys, I discovered many other teachers who had allergies, asthma, and headaches, all attributed to indoor air quality issues. Through filing an OSHA complaint, we discovered inadequate housekeeping procedures had led to thick layers of dust and debris in our schoolwide heating and ventilation system, and filters not being cleaned or replaced on a regular basis. Those issues were addressed, but the smells and mold and sickness related to the old carpeting persisted - carpeting rolls and tears were causing trip hazards and preventing even well-intended cleaning efforts from fixing the air quality issues in our building. It has taken another OSHA complaint to finally have a remediation plan in place for this coming summer – three years since my classroom flooded – to ensure that all the carpeting in the building will be removed.

This one story is simply a microcosm of what is happening all across our state in our public schools. Attached to my testimony is a press release related to a survey of over 1,200 teachers

conducted this past fall by the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). In it, 48% of Connecticut teachers reported damaged walls, ceiling tiles, carpeting, or vents in their classrooms, and 39% have experienced mold and mildew problems. And let's remember – what affects our teachers also affects our students.

But failures to properly maintain flooring, air ducts, and ventilation systems aren't the only issues plaguing the indoor air quality of our schools. For the past year I have co-led an effort with CEA to investigate extreme temperatures in our classrooms. Last spring, we launched a pilot program in several school districts around the state, where every morning and afternoon, dozens of teachers record the temperature and humidity level of their classrooms into an online database.

The results have been astounding.

As we moved from May into June, and then again from August into September, we saw temperature levels regularly in the 80s, often in the 90s, and once even above 100°F. In some of these districts, schools were closed early due to the excessive heat in classrooms. I, myself, have even taught a few physics classes in the hallway because it was cooler than being in my classroom. When was the last time you had to regularly work in an office where the temperature was in the 80s or 90s? I'd venture to guess, never. And yet these are the conditions we are asking our teachers and kids to endure while trying to deliver and receive a high-quality education. It simply doesn't work.

And here's something even more shocking to those of us leading the pilot program – did you know that the American Veterinary Medical Association has ambient temperature guidelines for cats and dogs in animal shelters (60-80°F), and that the Animal Welfare Act regulations state that indoor housing for dogs at research and breeding facilities must never rise above 85°F for more than four consecutive hours? That happens on a regular basis in schools across this state, but kids and educators are left to fend for ourselves and make the best of it day in and day out. It's just not right. Legislation defining acceptable temperature ranges for classrooms is simply not too much to ask.

The time has come for legislators to step in and help our public schools. So many of them are suffering from infrastructure problems that are causing poor teaching and learning conditions. We are getting sick at school due to poor indoor air quality and extreme temperatures, and the result is increased illness and loss of instructional time for students and teachers. I urge you to pass legislation that ensures and establishes healthy indoor learning conditions for schools that are conducive to successful teaching and learning for all students.

Thank you.

