

Written Testimony Of
Melanie Rakoczy, Stamford Teacher,
Before the
Committee on Public Health
Regarding
Raised House Bill No. 5431
An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools
March 5, 2020

My name is Melanie Rakoczy, and I am testifying in support of HB 5431.

I have worked at my current school in Stamford since 2001. For the last ten years or more, there has been no explanation for the health symptoms I have been experiencing, such as dizzy spells, breathing issues, low blood pressure, equilibrium issues, blackouts, burning eyes, aches and pains in joints, intestinal issues, headaches, vertigo, tinnitus, brain fog, memory loss, presyncope spells, and allergic rhinitis. Since October 2018, doctors have discovered that I am allergic to molds. In August of 2019, I had sinus surgery from bacteria buildup caused by exposure to my environment.

Excessive heat and cold issues have been a concern in the building I worked at for various reasons, such as problems with regulating the HVAC systems in each classroom, seasonal changes, small animals getting into the main HVAC system, extreme temperatures outside, and other unexplained reasons. Temperature meters were present in the building, and rooms were often checked. Solutions as to what we should do with a classroom full of students were not often provided, aside from moving to another room or sitting in the hallway. Numerous times I can recall the room temperature would be excessively hot or cold for multiple days.

There are a few incidents that stand out as an unhealthy work environment. One classroom that I was in for 15 years always had temperature control issues, causing the classroom to be very warm. It would get so hot in the classroom I would have to sit with the students in the hallway. The HVAC system was working, and I was constantly cleaning black debris off the top of the unit on a weekly basis. The rooms surrounding my classroom would fluctuate from extremely hot to extremely cold, so you would walk into one room and be very warm and walk into another room and need a winter jacket. The windows could only be opened about two inches, and there were no fans provided. The air quality by the end of the day with a room full of students was often unbearable, and we would need to leave the room. I would experience the medical concerns listed above on a daily basis.

In 2017, after returning from holiday break, the classrooms were over 100 degrees. Crayons were melted, tables warped, magnets curled and fell off the boards, candies melted, floors buckled. We never got an answer as to how many days it was like this during break. School took place that day, and it was very hot most of the day. Medical concerns when the temperature of the room was unbearable consisted of dizzy spells, headaches, blackouts, concentration issues, and difficulty breathing.

The result of the extreme temperatures caused mold to grow throughout the building, including in the HVAC systems. The glue on the wallpaper mixed with the excessive heat and moisture caused mold spores to rapidly cultivate. Floor tiles warped due to excessive heat and moisture. Mold was not often easily visible, but upon further inspection, teachers discovered mold behind ceiling tiles, around pipes, behind the wallpaper, on baseboards, on student shared materials, and around windows. We began to notice that many of us, including students, were having many medical concerns that affected our work habits and ability to function in our environment. Many of us are concerned that the exposure to these elements will have lifelong effects on our overall health.

I urge this committee to consider implementing minimum and maximum temperatures for classrooms.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this important issue.