**Written Testimony of**
**Melanie Rakoczy**
**Stamford Educator**
**Before the**
**Public Health Committee**
**Regarding**

**RAISED SENATE BILL NO. 288**
**AN ACT CONCERNING INDOOR AIR QUALITY IN SCHOOLS**

**FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of this esteemed committee. My name is Melanie Rakoczy, and I am a teacher working for the Stamford Public School System. I am testifying in support of SB 288.

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 spell, and allergic rhinitis. Since October 2018, doctors have discovered that I am allergic to molds. I had sinus surgery from bacteria buildup caused by exposure to my environment in August of 2019.

Excessive heat and cold issues have been a concern in the building where I worked, 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 various 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 room to be very warm. It would get so hot in the room I would have to sit with 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 2 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 the HVAC systems. The glue on the wallpaper, mixed with the excessive heat and moisture, caused mold spores to rapidly multiply. The floor tiles warped due to the excessive heat and moisture. The mold exposure was not easily visible, but upon further inspection the teachers discovered mold behind ceiling tiles, around pipes, behind the wallpaper, baseboard, on student shared materials, and around the windows. We began to notice that many of us, including students, began 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.

After 2 years and a 24-million-dollar renovation, the staff returned to the building in August to begin the 2020-2021 school year. In August, contractors discovered accumulating condensation due to a deficiency in the HVAC balance, which caused mold growth. It was determined that the over 10-year-old chiller needed software modifications and parts replaced. From mid-September to the end of October, the staff experienced a number of building concerns, including growth spots on the ceiling tiles that occurred daily in classrooms, readings of up to 91% relative humidity levels in some rooms while other rooms had temperature readings of 48 degrees. Various classrooms had confirmed mold spore counts of moderate to high. Symptoms that I had not experienced in over a year were starting to return, such as sinus pressure, headaches, and shortness of breath. By the end of October, I was back on budesonide for acute chronic rhinitis, ethmoidal/maxillary/frontal sinusitis for the next two months. The building is tested weekly by a hygienist, and as the temperatures outside have cooled down the moisture issues in the building have decreased. There are weekly meetings to discuss the building concerns, and the staff has been informed that they are preparing for the worst-case scenario with regards to the moisture issues when the temperatures rise in the spring.

This committee should consider establishing minimum and maximum temperatures for classrooms.

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

Sincerely,

Melanie Rakoczy