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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
MELANIE I. KOLEK, LEGAL COUNSEL  
CONNECTICUT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH  
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 Kolek, and I am legal counsel for the Connecticut Education Association, proudly representing public school teachers across our state. I am commenting on several important aspects of Raised Senate Bill No. 288.

I have the privilege and honor of representing CEA teachers in their workers' compensation matters. Over the course of at least the last four years, we have seen a spike in the number of cases involving exposure to mold and other environmental toxins in their schools and classrooms. As I testified before you last year, the 2019-2020 school year was by far the worst in terms of the numbers of teachers falling seriously ill due to just showing up for work. In relevant part, we counted at least 60 teachers in the Stamford School district who were suffering and some who continue to suffer from the known mold and toxin exposures in their schools.

We have also spoken with parent groups about the illnesses their children are facing. Not only as an attorney but as a parent and a taxpayer in our state, I find the reports of credible incidents of illness staggering—and they are only getting worse.

In our state, we have maximum temperatures for dog kennels and pet shops. But we have no minimum and maximum temperatures for school classrooms. This inequity must be addressed, and not just in school gymnasiums, since most of our students are spending time in their core subject classrooms. Students simply cannot learn in environments that are too hot or cold, not to mention the serious health effects of learning and working in those conditions. Our school staff and students should not have to fear getting sick just by walking in the doors of their schools.

The bill before you is what I call an accountability bill. It provides clarification as to where classroom issues should be reported, which is critical, considering a survey conducted by CEA proved that teachers were reporting issues to administrators with nothing done thereafter to remedy the situation. The bill brings Connecticut in line with national safety standards being used for schools across the United States. It gives the local taxpayers the necessary information as to whether they want or need to dedicate money to certain school-related projects.

If we do not act now, I fear that this issue will become an epidemic in towns and cities across the state. This is a fundamental issue for our state's students and educators, which is why this needs to be implemented immediately. Thank you.