



Testimony of

**Louis Rosado Burch**  
**Coalition for Healthy Air in Schools**

Before the  
**Public Health Committee**

Re:  
**HB 5479 AAC Indoor Air Quality in Schools**

**March 21, 2022**

Representative Steinberg, Senator Anwar honorable Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members, and rank-and-file members of the CGA Public Health Committee. My name is Louis Rosado Burch, Legislative Coordinator for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

I am testifying today on behalf of the **Coalition for Healthy Air in Schools**, which is comprised of parents, educators, labor unions, building trade workers, contractors, public employees, environmental advocacy groups, and healthcare workers. We stand in strong support of HB 5479, applaud the committee for raising this important concept, and respectfully urge you to strengthen and pass this important legislation for the benefit of Connecticut school children and educators alike.

When the coronavirus reached us in March of 2020, it became immediately apparent that our failure to invest in maintaining and improving the ventilation systems in our public buildings would have drastic consequences. Our desire to safely reopen our schools was significantly compromised by our inability to guarantee the necessary air filtration and minimum amount of ventilation for acceptable indoor air quality per ASHRAE Standard 62.1.

While the problems in our schools understandably received the most attention, the issue was no less severe in many of our public buildings – hospitals, post offices, even the Capitol and Legislative Office Building. The State’s decades-long failure to maintain and upgrade HVAC systems and take concerns about indoor air quality seriously has had a significant impact on the health of our communities. Though the most recent variant of the coronavirus seems to be finally receding, the need to improve the indoor air quality in our public buildings, especially our schools, remains. We cannot ignore the lessons of the past two years.

Our coalition members rejoiced when they learned Governor Lamont’s budget adjustments included \$90 million for improving indoor air quality. This funding is an important first step, but there is still much work to be done to adequately address the spectrum of indoor air quality issues plaguing our schools. Legislative action is

needed to set minimum indoor air quality and temperature standards, establish monitoring and reporting requirements, guarantee HVAC work is undertaken by trained, certified technicians, and ensure a sustained long-term funding mechanism to fund necessary HVAC system installations, repairs, and upgrades moving forward.

Our coalition members appreciate the leadership, time, and resources this committee has already committed to this important issue in recent years. We wish to highlight that *the Committee on Labor and Public Employees has also introduced a bill (SB 423) to address IAQ issues and establish health-protective standards*, and the Finance Committee has also introduced measures to fund important HVAC system upgrades using school construction bond monies. Given the commitment of so many legislators to address this issue, we ask members across these committees to work together toward the passage of the strongest, most health-protective landmark legislation possible, with a sustainable funding stream to support school HVAC repairs over time.

To that end, CEA supports the bill before you, with recommendations to strengthen the important measures being proposed. Sec. 1(c) of the bill sets an indoor temperature limit for school gymnasiums only (lines 40-47). The temperature requirements spelled out here are helpful, but they completely ignore the plethora of school facilities outside the gymnasium where students and teachers spend time.

Further, the bill exceeds the 76 degree guideline suggested by OSHA for office buildings. This requirement is unnecessarily narrow and needs to be expanded to cover the full scope of school facilities. Year after year, we have seen examples of classroom temperatures in the 90's and above. Research indicates this contributes to "heat stress" and other factors that are un conducive to student achievement. School indoor air temperatures must be maintained in all school facilities, not just in the gymnasium.

In order to consistently maintain air quality standards required under ASHRAE standard 62, periodic HVAC system assessments are needed *at least* once every three years, if not more frequently. These assessments should be conducted by HVAC technicians certified by a body accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Further, a dedicated funding stream will be needed to support necessary HVAC repairs and replacement, as needed. SB 423 includes these measures, and we recommend committee members work to incorporate these health protective standards in HB 5479 as well.

Clear protocols are needed to provide oversight and ensure that school HVAC repairs are being performed by qualified licensed HVAC contractors and certified technicians. Additionally, we need specific standards to establish what acceptable indoor air quality and indoor air temperatures are for our children. Benchmarks are needed to evaluate the performance of HVAC systems, so that old systems can be replaced as needed. *This effort must not simply be about repairing aging, outdated HVAC systems. School districts must be equipped with the resources and standards needed to replace those systems where appropriate, using state of the art, high-efficiency HVAC and air filtration systems.*

CEA believes these measures represent an important step forward in improving indoor air quality and promoting safe, healthy learning environments for students and teachers alike. We strongly support HB 5479, and urge the committee to strengthen this bill by mirroring key air quality and indoor temperature standards, certified technician requirements and reporting requirements spelled out in SB 423, which were modeled on successful legislation in New Jersey.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you in advance for your attention and your support for this important issue. We look forward to working with the committee to advance this legislation moving forward.

Respectfully Submitted,

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<sup>1</sup> See New Jersey's 2020 bill SB 3995 (<https://legiscan.com/NJ/text/S3995/2020> )

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