



Testimony of

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President, Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Committee on Labor and Public Employees

Re:
SB 423 AAC Indoor Air Quality in Public School Classrooms

March 15, 2022

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, honorable Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members, and rank-and-file members of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees. My name is Kate Dias, and I serve as President of the Connecticut Education Association. Today I am testifying 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 together in support of SB 423 and urge you to pass this important legislation as soon as possible.

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 the most current version of 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 refusal 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. Clear protocols are needed to provide oversight and ensure that the work is 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.

Lastly, we need expert technicians to oversee and enforce indoor air quality standards. None of these are provided for in the Governor's budget proposal.

SB 431 will help our state respond to this challenge by providing our schools with clear guidance regarding acceptable indoor temperatures and air quality, enabling the use of school construction funds to support HVAC system installations, upgrades, replacements, and repairs, and by directing the Department of Labor to ensure necessary school HVAC projects are completed in a timely fashion. Specifically, the bill provides for the following:

1. Establishes mandatory indoor temperature and relative humidity levels for the classroom consistent with OSHA office space guidelines (68-76 degrees Fahrenheit for acceptable indoor air temperatures, 20-60% for humidity).
2. Requires school building to close if the mandatory school temperature ranges cannot be maintained for a period of 2 hours or longer, without diminishment of pay for school staff & faculty;
3. Requires the Departments of Labor, the Department of Education, and OPM to develop a school indoor air quality assessment and ventilation monitoring program, with an IAQ assessment to be completed by a certified technician at least once every three years;
4. Requires local school districts to meet the temperature, maintenance, and repair standards and provides for complaints about violations to be submitted to ConnOSHA. The Department of Labor would have the authority to respond to complaints and ensure districts have taken corrective actions as recommended through IAQ assessment reports.
5. Expands the use of school building construction bond funds to include necessary HVAC system installations, upgrades, replacements, and repairs as it already does for projects like roofing.

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 SB 423, and further recommend tweaking the language slightly to clarify that acceptable school temperature and relative humidity ranges established by the Dept. of Labor should be consistent with the definitions laid out in this legislation. This can be achieved simply by adding "in accordance with the definitions in Section 1 (a)(12) and Section 1 (a)(13)" on line 63. This section should read as follows:

"Section 2. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2022) (a) On or before August 15, 2022, the Labor Department shall, in accordance with the definitions in Section 1 (a)(12) and Section 1 (a)(13), establish: A mandatory public school temperature range".

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.

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