

Testimony of

Donald Williams, Jr.
Executive Director, 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

(PLEASE NOTE: A technical change in the bill language is included at the end of the testimony)

Good afternoon members of the Labor Committee.

I am Don Williams, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association.

Thank you for raising SB 423 concerning air quality in our schools.

The health of students and staff in our schools depends in large part on the quality of the air they breathe. Hot temperatures, high humidity, and mold, however, make students and staff sick. Studies show that unhealthy air and high temperatures have a domino effect leading to higher rates of respiratory illness. Schools with no air conditioning see classroom temperatures rise into the 80s, 90s and beyond in the months at the beginning and end of the school year.

In addition, high temperatures undermine academic performance. A study at Harvard University concluded that when temperatures rise into the 80s and beyond, “student learning suffers.” That should surprise no one.

Schools in every region of the state are affected, but schools in urban areas and distressed communities are often under-resourced, and less likely to be air-conditioned.

By way of comparison, Connecticut has temperature and ventilation regulations to protect animals in Connecticut pet stores—with specific temperature requirements between the 60s and 70s. However, there are no protections at present for students in Connecticut schools.

SB 423 would fix this problem.

It would require keeping schools at the same temperature range that OSHA recommends for office buildings—between 68 and 76 degrees. As CEA President Kate Dias said earlier today, the temperature standard is critical, or nothing will be accomplished.

The bill also provides an equitable way to fund the air handling upgrades—in the same way we reimburse cities and towns for fixing a leaky school roof—through school construction bond funds. The idea that fixing a leaky roof is eligible for reimbursement but fixing an air handling system is not, does not make sense. This change is long overdue and would allow all towns to fix their air quality problems.

With this committee's leadership, the legislature can ensure healthy air in our schools. It will protect the students and adults who spend hundreds of hours in our schools each year. They deserve no less. Thank you for your support of SB 423.

TECHNICAL CHANGE FOR JFS LANGUAGE:

In Section 2 (line 62), the following change and addition are requested:

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

This change would underscore the link between the temperature range established by the Labor Department and that described in the definitions in Section 1. It is better that the link is explicit rather than implied. Thank you!