

**Testimony on Bill No. SB 376: An Act Concerning State Grant
Commitments for School Building Projects and Concerning Changes to
Statutes Concerning School Building Projects**

March 8, 2010

Members of the Education Committee:

Our names are Brendan and Alison Reilly. We live in Westport, CT and are the parents of five adopted children aged ten years to 2 months old. Our concern regarding the proper maintenance of HVAC systems in schools began in 2007 when our doctors informed us that our oldest child, Aidan, should not attend his school, King's Highway Elementary School because they believed his lung capacity and immune system were adversely impacted due to his exposure to contaminants in the building. We were shocked that our child's school building – a building that was supposed to be a safe place for him to learn and grow – could be making him sick.

We did everything we could to protect our son in his school environment. Alison sat on a town committee dedicated to investigating and improving the condition of King's Highway. We were dismayed when reports uncovered by the committee revealed that the Superintendent had known for several years that King's Highway had severe ventilation problems. He claimed that he had "addressed" this serious problem by adding "ventilation repairs and improvements" to the capital forecast. Unfortunately, the essential repairs to our school's ventilation system were pushed back numerous times over the next several years. Finally, this year after our son and several other students and teachers filed health complaints, the King's Highway community pressured the Board of Education to expedite funding for the ventilation system.

We appreciate the Board's long overdue approval of funds for the King's Highway ventilation system. However, the funding came too late for our son. A year and a half ago his doctors informed us that he should not go to King's Highway as they believed that the conditions in the building were making him sick. We followed their recommendations and moved Aidan to a private school. This impacted not only Aidan, but our entire family. We are, after all, a family and we stick together. This meant that our two other school-aged daughters also had to make the transition from public to private school. While we are thrilled that our son's health has improved dramatically since he left King's Highway, moving our three children to a private school has been a tremendous and unexpected financial expense to our family.

When Alison served on the town committee, she learned that school districts often defer essential maintenance projects because such repairs and improvements are viewed as costly and "invisible" to parents and voters. Unfortunately, such projects are often deferred for decades resulting in the deterioration of facilities and public health crises. King's Highway paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in remediation costs and recently budgeted over \$3 million for improvements to its ventilation system – an enormous amount of money in a dire fiscal environment. Our town and its taxpayers could have

avoided much of this expense if the ventilation problems at King's Highway had been addressed in a timely manner. One of the fundamental findings of our town maintenance committee was: "In worst-case scenarios, deferred maintenance can result in a building component's failure (—breakdown status). The expense to repair such failing components can be as great as 15x the non-deferred cost (Gaeslin's Inverse-Square Rule for Deferred Maintenance)." Kings Highway Elementary School Special Maintenance Committee: Report of Investigations and Recommendations Into Mold and Air Quality (March 2008) pg 45. Luckily, Westport has the funds necessary to improve the ventilation system at King's Highway. Other school districts in Connecticut would not be able to pay such an exorbitant sum of money to repair or replace their schools' HVAC systems.

As set forth above, there are other costs too – human costs. Deferred maintenance at King's Highway caused several of the teachers and students, including our son, to suffer adverse health symptoms such as respiratory infections asthma and decreased lung capacity, chronic headaches and bloody noses.

We believe that making costs of repairing or replacing heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems in schools eligible for purposes of calculating eligible costs for school building projects will encourage and allow school districts across Connecticut to properly address these important repairs and replacements properly in a timely manner.

As representatives of parents of school-aged children in your districts, we strongly urge you all to add language to Bill No. SB 376 that deals with repairs and replacements to HVAC systems and to establish minimum standards that school districts must meet to be funded by the State of Connecticut.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our testimony.

Respectfully,


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