

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-423

AN ACT IMPROVING INDOOR AIR QUALITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

Title: CLASSROOMS.

Vote Date: 3/22/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/15/2022

File No.: 320

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill establishes guidance through the Department of Labor related to appropriate temperature and humidity level ranges in indoor, public-school buildings. This bill provides avenues for school districts to receive grants to improve their HVAC systems to provide healthy indoor air quality to school buildings. This bill is designed to ensure that members of the education community—staff, teachers, and students—are protected by ensuring local and regional boards of education implement policies to support healthy indoor air quality in schools. Currently, schools around Connecticut are suffering from indoor air quality issues, such as mold, mildew, and asbestos, among others which leads to members of education communities suffering from chronic sinus infections, colds, and other illnesses.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Administrative Services; states that the Department of Administrative Services supports the concept of a grant program to provide funding for the indoor air quality of our public schools. It is stated that the committee should work with other committees, such as Education, Environment, and Public Health, to coordinate proposals.

Department of Public Health, Commissioner, Manisha Juthani; states that the purpose of the bill is important, and further states that DPH supports using ASHRAE Standard 62.1 to gauge heating and air conditioning system performance and identify acceptable indoor air quality parameters. It is also stated that DPH would support adding certified industrial hygienists to the list of individuals that can perform indoor air assessments.

Department of Labor, Legal Director, Heidi Lane; states that the Department of Labor supports the intent of the bill, however, there are currently no Federal OSHA Indoor Air Quality standards for Connecticut OSHA to adopt and enforce. It is further stated that because of this, Connecticut cannot use federal grant money for this bill, and Connecticut OSHA currently does not have funds to support the initiative.

Department of Education, Commissioner, Charlene Russell-Tucker; It is stated that the bill should recommend, rather than mandate, the temperature and humidity levels in schools. Requiring mechanical ventilation systems would not be feasible in some school buildings, due to their old nature of some buildings. It is further stated that closing schools due to temperature or humidity levels could have a serious impact on the student's abilities to learn as well as reaching the mandated 180 days in school requirement. It is also stated that section 5(b) of the bill requires school boards to obtain medical information that may infringe on privacy rights covered under HIPAA.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Mitch Bolinsky; supports this bill stating that has been necessary for a long time. It is further stated that this bill could be one of the only good things to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACES Educator, Sarah Holland; supports the bill stating that it is difficult to concentrate in environments with extreme temperatures. It is further stated that their classroom reaches 90 degrees in the summer and can be cold to the point where students and staff must wear coats, gloves, and hats to stay warm.

ACES Educator, Anne Pember; supports this bill stating that it is time for this legislation to be passed. It is further stated that their classroom had black mold in it, and the school addressed it only after years of her getting sinus infections. It is further stated that this bill would help to ensure that this issue does not impact educators and students in school buildings.

AFTCT, Divisional Vice-President, Mary Yordon; supports the bill stating that an acceptable temperature and humidity level range in schools is much needed. It is stated that this bill will open new sources of funding for schools to get repairs that are much needed to improve air quality in school buildings. It is further stated that this bill will also provide guidance which will lead to better decision-making in schools.

Asnuntuck Community College, Professor, Cheryl Turgeon; supports the bill and states that it should be expanded to all public learning institutions so that no one employed in public service as an educator is ever put in harm's way during their employment.

Asnuntuck Community College, Professor, Elle Van Dermark; supports the bill but states three concerns: all classrooms, schools, from K-12 all the way to higher education should be included in the bill; that the reports could be manipulated to obscure the results; and the results of the testing should be made available to the public to ensure transparency.

Associated Sheet Metal & Roofing Contractors of Connecticut (ASMRCC); supports this bill stating that it would help maintain quality indoor air in public schools, which improves the educational environment for students, teachers, and staff.

Barrett Inc., President, John A. Lucchesi, Jr.; supports the bill stating that it is long overdue, common-sense approach to combat indoor air quality issues and will bolster Connecticut's construction industry.

Clean Water Action, Connecticut Director, Anne Hulick; supports the bill stating that it will address critical air quality issues and positively contribute to the health of educators, staff, and students in school buildings. It is further stated that this bill would help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut, Veronica Douglas-Givan and Charles A. Pillsbury; supports the bill stating that it is an investment into children's futures. It is further stated that it shows families that their children will be able to breath safely at school.

Connecticut AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorn; supports the bill stating that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the ramifications that poor air quality in classrooms had on all members of school communities. It is further stated that there should be a small change to clarify that acceptable school temperatures and relative humidity ranges should be consistent with the definitions laid out in the bill.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education; supports the bill, however, states concerns that local funding would not be easy to obtain, given the fact that there are extensive costs and small state reimbursements. It is further stated that it is not appropriate for the Labor Department to establish a mandatory public-school temperature and humidity range. Instead, it should be left to the Department of Public Health.

Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Mykah Knight; supports the bill stating that many school districts are currently suffering from mold and other indoor air quality issues and that this bill would help to rectify some of these problems.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Executive Director and CEO, Joe DeLong; supports the bill stating the following suggestions: the Department of Public Health have cognizance over the mandatory public-school temperature and humidity ranges; greater discretion for remedying non-compliant temperature and humidity ranges when deciding to close the school for the day; and flexibility of a waiver process to effective date due to supply chain issues.

Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health, Assistant Director, Pamela Puchalski; supports the bill stating that it will improve the air quality in Connecticut school buildings, which will reduce risks associated with poor air quality, such as mold, infectious diseases, etc.

Connecticut Education Association, President, Kate Dias; supports the bill stating that the measures included in this bill are a step in the right direction to improve air quality and a healthy learning environment in schools.

Connecticut Nurses Association, Executive Director, Kimberly Sandor; supports the bill stating that it is needed now more than ever due to the pandemic. It is further stated that air quality is an essential part of a healthy school, and this bill helps to achieve that.

Connecticut, Resident, Kenny Foscue; supports this bill stating that all students and staff in Connecticut public schools deserve to work in a safe, healthy, and energy-efficient environment. It is further stated that the state should find additional sources of funding through the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure law.

Connecticut, Resident, Jennifer Jacobsen; supports the bill stating that they want to see language added specifying that this bill applies to indoor school facilities and that funding would be made available to the school districts so that they can comply with the regulations.

Connecticut, Resident, Joellen Lawson; supports the bill stating that this bill has a strong possibility of saving lives and preventing the daily pain and suffering that comes with illnesses related to a contaminated school.

Connecticut, Resident, Amanda Looney-Goetz; supports the bill stating they would like to see the bill extended to public colleges. It is further stated that they used to work at Asnuntuck Community College, which had various indoor air quality issues that led to health problems for both themselves and their coworkers.

Connecticut, Resident, Jason Morris; supports the bill stating that it will help the children in schools, and that this needs to happen as soon as possible.

Connecticut State Building Trades Council, President, Keith Brothers; supports the bill stating that it could benefit thousands of mechanical trades, construction workers, and contractors by including workforce development language. It is further stated that this bill addresses the standards required to maintain a safe school environment.

Connecticut State Building Trades Council, Executive Director, Joseph Toner; supports the bill stating that it is long overdue and would also help with workforce development. It is further stated that the language should be tweaked to show that acceptable temperatures and humidity levels are consistent with the definitions in the legislation.

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, President, Travis Woodward; supports the bill stating it will help the state respond to the challenge of air quality by setting guidance that is clear to all school districts and allows HVAC systems in school districts to be improved if necessary.

Eastern CT Green Action and People's Action for Clean Action, Peter Millman; supports the bill stating that it will provide members of school communities access to safer air, save school districts money, and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Connecticut.

Fairfield Educator, Kyle Astle; supports this bill stating it would help to reverse the impact of poor air quality in the schools.

Fairfield Educator, Victoria Kuan; supports the bill stating that they have been a public school teacher for 27 years, and this bill would help to reverse the impact that the indoor air quality

has on them as well as other members of the school community throughout the state of Connecticut.

Farmington Educator, Jessica Daniel; supports the bill stating that this bill is much needed. It is stated that their classroom is extremely hot in the summer months, which makes it difficult to ask students and staff members to work in these conditions.

Foundation for Fair Contracting of Connecticut, Director, Kimberly Glassman; supports this bill stating that this bill is a common-sense proposal and is long overdue and requires local boards of education to address the indoor air quality of their schools.

Groton Educator, Courtney Leivers; supports the bill stating that their art room is extremely hot the first and last month of the school year to the point where they had to move to cooler classrooms to conduct instruction.

Independent Electrical Contractors of New England, Executive Director, Allie French; supports this bill stating a request to change the wording in section 2(e) lines 133-134 be amended to reflect that the work performed can be from a trade contractor with the appropriate skills and training.

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and National Electrical Contractors Association, Bill Finch; supports the bill stating that the community has taken the air quality in our schools for granted for way too long.

Local Union 777, Cameron Champlin; supports this bill stating that this bill will ensure members of the school community are not exposed to toxic air due to insufficient ventilation.

Mechanical Contractors Association of Connecticut, Inc.; supports the bill stating that this bill is critical to the protection of members of Connecticut school communities from indoor air pollution.

Milford Educator, Kelley Regan O'Brien; supports the bill stating that currently their classroom frequently has an odor of mold and that they suffer from frequent headaches and sinus infections during the school year. It is further stated that these symptoms do not typically occur during school breaks and that educators should be comfortable in their spaces at school.

Nonnewaug Educator, Nickolas Sheikh; supports this bill stating that their school does not have adequate ventilation and the windows do not open. It is further stated that this bill would benefit all members of the education community who work in public schools.

Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 777, Jay More; supports the bill stating that it is long overdue. It is further stated that this bill provides opportunities for more jobs in the HVAC field specifically for construction workers working in the mechanical trade.

Region 18 Lyme, Superintendent of Schools, Ian Neviasser; supports this bill stating that a healthy school environment is vital to student success. It is further stated that this bill would also allow school districts to receive grant reimbursements which makes much-needed renovations more accessible for all schools in Connecticut.

Save the Sound, Climate Advocate, Alex Rodriguez; supports the bill stating that the funding in this bill is a step in the right direction to address the current problem of indoor air quality in school buildings. It is further stated that this bill will provide clear guidance for schools with respect to appropriate temperatures and humidity levels to be in school, which will benefit all members of the education community.

Sierra Club Connecticut, State Director, Samantha Dynowski; supports the bill stating that this bill will provide comfort to school communities by protecting these environments from mold and other dangerous toxins that can lead to diseases.

SEIU, Stacey Zimmerman; supports the bill.

SMART NERC – Local 40, Regional Manager, John Nimmons; supports this bill stating that the legislation will address critical health and safety concerns in Connecticut schools. It is further stated that this bill will help schools prepare for future outbreaks of infectious diseases. It is further stated that improving the performance of HVAC systems in schools would save energy and would have a significant correlation with respect to student performance.

Southington Educator, Michelle Daigle; supports the bill stating that with all the funding that has been given to improve the air quality in schools, members of the school community should not still be suffering.

Stamford Educator, Laura Dickey; supports the bill stating that it is hard to expect students to learn in an environment with uncomfortable temperatures.

Stamford Educator, Tara Karlson; supports the bill stating that there have been times when their class was forced to go outside or find a different classroom due to extremely high temperatures. It is further stated that they are asking for a change to be made to solve this issue.

Stamford Educator, Matthew Tiscia; supports this bill stating that they had to miss a whole year of school due to a mold issue. It is further stated that mold had been an issue in his school frequently and the school district did not check mold levels.

The Connecticut Coalition for Economic and Environmental Justice, Executive Director, Sharon Lewis; supports the bill stating that failing to respond to poor indoor air quality fast and effectively could lead to serious consequences, especially because a lot of schools in Connecticut consist of older buildings with outdated air quality systems.

Thompson Educator, Louise Morrison; supports this bill stating it is long overdue and will help members of the education community. It is further stated that over the years that they have worked, there have been several roof issues, mold problems, and huge brown spots on the ceiling and that this bill would help to prevent this from happening in the future.

Trumbull Educator, Jessica Grossman; supports the bill stating that it is difficult to expect 25 five-year old children to learn in an uncomfortable, warm environment especially because they cannot control their body temperatures.

Waterbury Educator, Anthony Della Calce; supports the bill stating that it would help to reverse the impact poor air quality has on people who work in schools. It is stated that the rooms in the school has hit extremely high temperatures, whereas a coat is needed in other rooms to stay warm. It is further stated that there needs to be a commitment by policymakers to address this issue.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Executive Director, Fran Rabinowitz; supports the idea that schools receive quality air, however, states that this bill is not realistic for schools without money to purchase and install the systems that this bill requires. It is further stated that money should be invested into this bill to achieve the air quality that the bill desires.

Connecticut Association of School Business Officials; opposes the bill stating that it is a costly and rigid approach to addressing this issue. It is stated that the state guidelines being imposed in this bill should be decided at the local level. It is further stated that since this bill has a significant impact on local education, the bill should be looked at by the Public Health and Education committee for their review.

Connecticut Council of Small Towns, Executive Director, Betsy Gara; supports the efforts to fund school building improvements to address indoor air quality in schools, however, has concerns with the bill. It is stated that this bill would result in a state mandate which would be costly to public school districts. It is further stated that the committee should focus their efforts on ensuring necessary HVAC upgrades are eligible to be fully reimbursed under the Connecticut school construction program. It is further stated that appropriate funding should be made available on an ongoing basis to improve indoor air quality for students and school personnel.

Connecticut, Resident, David Godbout; opposes this bill stating it is a violation of the 4th amendment.

Ellington Public Schools, Director of Finance and Operations, Brian Greenleaf; opposes this bill stating that while they do recognize that improving air quality in public school classrooms is an admirable goal, this bill would severely hinder the ability of schools to meet their core mission of educating students.

Regional School District 8, Acting Superintendent, Scott Leslie; opposes the bill stating that this issue should be left for individual school districts to decide how to handle it. It is stated that this bill would increase costs for the school districts. It is further stated that it would be difficult to reach 180 school days if the buildings were required to be closed due to heat and humidity levels.

Reported by: Jack Weitsen

Date: March 30, 2022