

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5347

AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND REVISIONS TO THE SCHOOL

Title: BUILDING PROJECTS STATUTES.

Vote Date: 3/20/2024

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Finance, Revenue and

Vote Action: Bonding

PH Date: 3/6/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

Rep. Kate Farrar, 20th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill proposes funding for school construction projects and modifications to the current laws governing such projects. Proposed state grant commitments would assist with school facility construction, renovation, and development. The bill's suggested revisions to current statute aim to speed up processes, update rules, and make necessary corrections. This bill aims to guarantee that schools have the resources and facilities they need to offer quality education to kids while also resolving any regulatory shortcomings in existing laws.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language for this bill makes various minor changes to the underlying bill, including some technical revisions and clarifications. It also requires that local fire marshals, rather than the state fire marshal as stated in the original text, provides attestation to the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). Furthermore, it adds a provision to shorten the timeline for triggering a limited scope audit. Finally, it removes the provisions prohibiting construction managers bidding on project elements and allowing site preparation to begin before a guaranteed maximum price is established.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut Department of Administrative Services, Commissioner, Michelle Gilman: supports the intent of the bill, highlighting the importance of upgrading and updating school building project regulations. Their testimony focuses on specific parts of the bill, such as fixing a drafting error, explaining responsibilities in the application review process, and eliminating some Priority List categories, which they support. They also express concern over Section 5, emphasizing the need for clarification on jurisdiction and the role of local governments in applying compliance with fire safety standards.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Mechanical Contractors Association of Connecticut, Executive Vice President, Kristen Abrahamson: supports this bill. Their testimony focuses on the bill's acceptance of the 2024 School Building Project Priority List and the authorization of state funding commitments for various school construction projects. They underline the importance of state money in assisting towns and local education districts, as well as the huge economic advantages that such investments provide. They emphasize the importance of spending on infrastructure for Connecticut's quality of life, as well as its beneficial impact on job creation and economic activity in the construction industry.

Connecticut Education Association, Legislative Coordinator, Louis Rosado Burch: supports this bill and its importance in improving indoor air quality in schools, especially in low-income urban and suburban settings. They emphasize two important provisions: first, they expand eligibility for DAS HVAC grant funds to state-funded charters and other previously excluded educational institutions, guaranteeing equal access to air quality improvements. Second, they support the bill's need for automatic review of grant applications filed before July 2024, mentioning the challenges that certain districts confront while navigating the application process. They fight for a more equal and welcoming strategy that emphasizes disadvantaged schools, to provide healthy indoor conditions to all Connecticut public school kids.

Private Citizen, Meri Beatrice: supports the bill that allows State funding commitments for school construction projects, discussing the urgent need for safety adjustments at John Wallace Middle School in Newington. They point out the outdated Open Classroom notion, which raises serious safety issues for children and staff during lockdowns. The lack of permanent doors and soft walls in classrooms jeopardizes safety and causes distractions, reducing students' ability to concentrate and study successfully.

Bristol Public Schools, Superintendent Catherine Carbone: supports this bill and fights for full funding to allow important improvements in Bristol Public Schools. They emphasize the need of increasing full-day prekindergarten programming and high school culinary routes through these modifications. They stress the importance of legislative and economic support in providing a balanced public school experience for all Connecticut families.

Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, Executive Director, Aziz Dehkan: supports this bill and advises that the language from Section 15 of HB 5004 be added to increase benefits for renewable energy and energy efficiency projects in school building funds. They emphasize the need to implement climate change techniques and promote environmental justice. They point out the need to motivate school districts to invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Town of Windsor, Oliver Ellsworth School, Special Education Teacher, Stefanie Dominguez: supports the bill, which underlines the need for healthy air quality in classrooms. They describe their personal experience with a severe allergic response to mold in their school building, which caused major discomfort and medical difficulties. Their testimony emphasizes the serious effect of poor air quality on both personal well-being and job responsibilities, reinforcing the need for immediate action to create a safe learning environment for both children and instructors.

Education Reform Now, Executive Director, Amy Dowell: supports this bill and its efforts to promote fairness and equal access to safe learning environments for all Connecticut kids. They say that all public-school kids, regardless of school type, need access to safe and healthy learning environments, emphasizing the bill's relevance in achieving educational fairness. They seek support for the bill to guarantee that all kids have equal access to a great education.

LEARN, Executive Director, Kate Ericson: supports this bill and its potential to establish a valuable community resource. They argue that this law corresponds with their aim of redesigning early childhood and primary school programs, providing an environmentally friendly educational route that matches the requirements of families while also providing greater assistance for children in the state's southeastern area. Using statistics from the Office of Early Childhood, they emphasize the urgent requirement to address infant/toddler care shortages and the growing demand for special education services.

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Kate Farrar: supports this bill specifically focusing on the budget for the renovation of John Wallace Middle School in Newington, CT. They emphasize the school's importance, serving around 600 students and reflecting the ideals of preparation, respect, integrity, determination, and excellence (P.R.I.D.E.). The money will allow for the breakdown and renovation of the inside, improving value for 21st-century schooling while also improving security with new doors and upgrading HVAC and electrical systems.

Connecticut Charter Schools Association, Policy Director, Cassandra Gallion: supports the bill, especially Section 16, which addresses charter schools' access to Indoor Air Quality grant funds. They emphasize the need for clean air and healthy learning conditions for all public-school students, including those in charter schools, and highlight inconsistencies in facility financing. They emphasize the significance of fair treatment for charter school kids, who face equivalent dangers but lack access to essential resources.

Achievement First Public Schools, Director of External Relations, Nakia Hall: supports this bill pushing for the incorporation of public charter schools in the HVAC Indoor Air Quality Grant Program. They stress the need for safe and sanitary learning environments for all kids, regardless of school type or location, focusing on the issues encountered by schools serving Black, brown, and low-income students. They state the unjust choice between classroom learning and fixing hazardous equipment.

School and State Finance Project, Executive Director, Lisa Hammersley: supports the bill, notably Section 16, which increases qualification for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning funds to a variety of educational institutions. They stress every Connecticut

student's right to learn in safe, healthy surroundings, regardless of school type or location. Their testimony stresses the value of addressing air quality problems while also providing equal access to resources for all public schools.

Newington Public Schools, Dr. Forest Helvie: supports this bill encouraging for money to upgrade John Wallace Middle School to provide a secure learning environment. They are concerned about the lack of doors in classrooms, which presents a safety risk in the event of an intruder. They also stress the issues that students and staff encounter as a result of distractions from surrounding classes and privacy concerns, emphasizing the necessity for improved facilities.

Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, Executive Director, Steven Hernandez: supports the bill, which advocates for the importance of safe and appropriate educational settings in allowing effective education. They emphasize the need to address physical safety issues, especially given the pandemic's findings about school infrastructure limits. They argue for the fair distribution of public finances based on need, recognizing the legislation's devotion to this objective.

Achievement First Charter Schools, Chief of Middle Schools, Charmayne Joseph: supports this bill focusing on the incorporation of public charter schools in the HVAC Indoor Air Quality Grant Program. They advocate for equal access, pointing out that charter schools serve historically disadvantaged communities and should not be denied important resources. Lack of consistent facilities funding usually requires charter schools to redirect resources away from teaching and staffing to handle urgent repairs, affecting kids' learning environments.

Private Citizen, Geraldine Koppe: supports the bill, particularly for the reconstruction of John Wallace Middle School, emphasizing the significance of student safety. They emphasize the need to create a safe learning environment for students to protect their future. Their testimony highlights the need to prioritize school security measures for the safety and academic performance of all children.

Oliver Ellsworth Elementary School, Teacher and Education Association Union Representative, Melissa Lafayette: supports this bill emphasizing the urgent need to address indoor air quality issues in Oliver Ellsworth Elementary School. They highlight over 20 years of firsthand experience witnessing detrimental impacts of poor air quality on students and staff. They stress the financial and educational tolls of medical costs, loss of learning time, and denied compensation due to mold-related health issues.

Brass City Charter Schools, CEO, Nancy Landona: supports the bill, highlighting the significance of allowing public charter schools access to air quality grant funds. As the Chief Operating Officer of Brass City Charter School in Waterbury, they emphasize the outstanding financial load and safety problems that charter schools face due to a lack of access to such financing. They emphasize the need for HVAC system upgrades at the school to provide a clean and safe learning environment for kids and staff. They feel that this bill would ensure that all kids, regardless of charter status, have equal access to learning spaces that are both pleasant and healthy.

Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local 1, President, Gerald Marotti: supports the bill encouraging the Education Committee to approve it. They emphasize the bill's acceptance of the 2024 School Building Project Priority List and approval of state grant commitments for eleven new projects, as well as the renewal of two projects. They emphasize the important function of state support in aiding towns and local school districts, as well as the significant economic advantages and job development prospects that these projects provide.

Latinos for Education Advocacy and Diversity (LEAD), Vice President/CPO, Maria Matos: supports the bill and its significance in revising the Air Quality Grant Program to make funds available to all schools. They claim that every child, regardless of school, needs clean air and that the bill aligns with their goal of providing a safe and healthy environment for all children. They emphasize the importance of the law for Danbury Public Schools, Connecticut's biggest high school, claiming that access to funding will decrease building maintenance costs and provide clean air for students.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Executive Director, Patrice McCarthy: supports the intent of this bill, but is concerned about Section 1's increased paraeducator qualifications and labor participation requirements. They argue that policies like this limit local hiring options and could worsen the already difficult challenge of hiring paraeducator posts. They argue that section 12 should be removed, mentioning contradictory in-service training requirements and arguing for a more shortened approach.

Connecticut Charter Schools Association, Interim Executive Director, Keira Neidhardt: supports the bill, particularly its emphasis on fair access to grant financing for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system repairs at public charter schools. They emphasize the difference in access to such financing between charter schools and regular public schools, as well as the urgent need to maintain clean, safe, and breathing air for all kids across the state. They stress the importance of clean air for student and instructor health, and he believes that expanding the Air Quality Grant program to charter schools confirms the commitment to educational justice and fairness.

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity, Children Policy Analyst, TJ Nuccio: supports the bill and emphasizes the importance of this financing in providing considerable assistance to cities facing infrastructure challenges. They understand the need of collecting additional funding for initiatives other than those specified in the statute. They hope this will be the first step toward enhancing educational facilities throughout the state.

Brass City Charter Schools, Parent, Joelle Perna: supports the bill and advocates for charter schools to participate in the HVAC Indoor Air Quality Program alongside public schools. They note that, while being public, charter schools have in the past received significant underfunding, especially for property maintenance. They emphasize that every student deserves a safe and healthy learning environment, stressing the need for clean air for both students and faculty. They believe that ignoring air quality could result in health problems and disturb the learning process.

Integrated Day Charter School, Director, Ellen Retelle: supports the bill, which highlights the school's origins and distinct approach to learning. They discuss the ongoing challenges her school has, such as the need for money to solve infrastructural concerns and provide

important supplies. They believe that incorporating charter schools in the Air Quality Grant Program is necessary for providing healthy learning environments, especially with the pandemic's emphasis on clean and operating buildings.

External Relations and Special Projects at Elevate Charter Schools, Director, Erienne Rojas: supports the bill, highlighting the need for maintaining safe and healthy learning environments. They emphasize the necessity of addressing basic needs such as clean classroom air to assist student development. They point out the difficulties experienced by schools such as Booker T. Washington Academy in balancing physical improvements with instructional program execution owing to budget inconsistencies.

City of Waterbury, Resident, Ana Rosa: supports this bill in hopes that it will provide public charter schools an equal opportunity to grant funds, especially for air quality improvements. They emphasize the long-standing decline of HVAC Indoor Air Quality Program funds to charter schools, requiring them to shift classroom resources or postpone important improvements. They emphasize the significance of student health and education and question whether it is fair to deny charter school students access to essential financing as compared to regular public schools.

Woodstock Academy, Head of School, Christopher Sanford: supports the bill and emphasizes the necessity of providing state money for established academies such as The Woodstock Academy, Norwich Free Academy, and The Gilbert School. They emphasize the bill's importance in guaranteeing equal access to funds for school construction projects, particularly for academies that serve over 3,000 public secondary school students from rural communities in Eastern and Western Connecticut.

Achievement First Hartford Academy, Head Custodian, Richard Serrano: supports this bill which pushes for public charter school participation in the HVAC Indoor Air Quality Grant Program. With 13 years of experience at Achievement First Hartford Academy, they reflect the importance of building a healthy atmosphere for instructors and staff. They demonstrate the restrictions of an old-fashioned system, emphasizing the dangers presented by poor air quality in a facility that serves 1,500 people daily.

Oliver Ellsworth School, Speech-Language Pathologist, Lisa Siana: supports this bill and stresses the need for clean air in classrooms. They focus on their personal experiences with health problems caused by mold sensitivity as a result of poor indoor air quality at work. They push for putting clean air first in schools to promote a safe and healthy atmosphere appropriate to successful educational circumstances for everybody.

Elevate Charter School, CEO, John Taylor: supports the bill, underlining the essential role of clean air financing in schools for the health and well-being of kids, teachers, and staff. They claim that low air quality has a negative influence on learning settings and student performance, citing studies that relate clean air to better academic achievements. They also highlight the educational possibilities provided by clean air efforts, which promote environmental preservation and long-term awareness among kids.

Oliver Ellsworth School, Teacher: shows strong support for this bill and emphasizes the need to provide aid to schools suffering health challenges. They describe their personal experiences with a decline in health, which they relate to poor air quality worsened by the

removal of the COVID-19 mask regulation. Despite having to pay health insurance costs as a result of these health difficulties, they ask for more funding and grants for all schools, particularly those in need, such as Oliver Ellsworth Elementary in Windsor.

StayWell Health Center, President, Don Thompson: supports this bill, which advocates for students in their community. The testimony emphasizes the significance of consistent financing for maintaining and enhancing school facilities, especially at Brass City Charter School. They underline the importance of prioritizing student safety and health by bringing public charter schools into the Air Quality Grant Program, especially given the obstacles that kids confront in areas with environmental risks such as lead paint and asbestos.

Mason Contractors Association of Connecticut, Executive Director, Michael Thompson: Supports the bill. They note the bill's acceptance of the 2024 School Building Project Priority List and the authorization of state funding commitments for several building projects. They stress the importance of state support in helping towns and school districts, as well as its major economic advantages to both state and local communities. In addition, they emphasize the importance of spending on infrastructure for Connecticut's quality of life, noting that school-building projects create major job creation and economic activity.

Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association Connecticut Chapter, Executive Director, Michael Thompson: supports this bill and urges the committee to adopt it. They underline the importance of state support for school construction projects, noting the economic advantages to towns and local communities, as well as the creation and maintenance of thousands of construction jobs and millions of dollars in economic activity. They believe that investing in Connecticut's infrastructure, particularly public-school development, is important for improving quality of life and supporting economic growth.

Matter Real Estate, CEO, Alex Weis: supports the bill that would provide public charter schools access to HVAC Air Quality Grants. Their testimony highlights the urgent need for educational facility renovations, pointing out the negative effects of out-of-date and poorly conditioned rooms on student learning and health. Relying on their expertise in managing remodeling projects, they emphasize the huge expenses and structural issues associated with modifying HVAC systems. They claim that all kids, including those in charter schools, have an equal right to clean and healthy learning environments.

Windsor Public Schools, Teacher, Rosanna Wilson: supports the bill because it tackles the pressing need for funds to address mold and air quality issues in schools, citing personal experience with their child's health difficulties at Oliver Ellsworth School. They emphasize the need of taking proactive efforts to detect and address such concerns in order to protect the health and safety of kids and instructors.

Private Citizen, Fiona York: supports this bill that advocates for state funding commitments for school construction projects, notably the reconstruction of John Wallace Middle School in Newington, Connecticut. Their testimony emphasizes the significance of such costs in upgrading educational infrastructure and the learning environment for students. As parents and educators in Newington, they emphasize the need of upgraded school facilities for the well-being and academic achievement of their community's students.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Private Citizen, Emrah Yanbul: raises opposition to this bill. They specifically object to lines 11-13, which mention the Greek massacre and raise concerns about potential bullying and trauma for Turkish American students. Their testimony highlights the need to protect young people from such sensitive and potentially harmful concepts in educational settings. They respectfully request that the committee consider eliminating or modifying the statements mentioned above to guarantee the safety of all children.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:

Associated General Contractors of Connecticut, Executive Director, John Butts: supports the intent of the bill particularly its budget allocation for school construction projects, mentioning possible economic advantages and employment creation. However, they disagree to some modifications to the construction change order procedure, claiming that they may violate industry norms and deny construction managers sufficient compensation. They suggest a modification to guarantee fulfillment of standard construction requirements and suggest a willingness to work together in developing ideas to improve the change order approval process.

American Institute of Architects, Executive Director/CEO, Gina Calabro: supports the intent of the bill, but also raises concerns about state school building funding responsibilities. They claim that preventing compensation for construction managers in some cases would violate industry agreements or contracts. They emphasize the stress put on construction managers by forcing them to cover additional expenses within the specified maximum price while also anticipating future lawsuit difficulties.

Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), Executive Director, Betsy Gara: supports the bill's objective to authorize school construction funds. However, they have concerns about Section 3. They have concerns that seeking funding for the total project cost, rather than just the local portion, may result in resistance due to greater project expenses. COST is requesting further information from partner local governments to better understand the real-world consequences and possible influence on school building approval processes.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Advocacy Manager, Lindsay Seti: supports the intent of the bill. They support Section 2(3)A, which allows for flexibility in redirecting school construction project grants, but are concerned about Section 3, which demands upfront funding for the whole project. They also disagree with Section 10, stating that fixed construction costs are unrealistic due to unexpected incidents, but they favor Section 16, which clarifies the review procedure for refused funding linked to HVAC systems in schools. Overall, they ask the Education Committee to carefully examine these issues while reviewing the bill.

Reported by: Mickaelah Joseph

Date: 4/8/24