

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-287

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING INDOOR AIR QUALITY IN SCHOOLS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/6/2024

File No.: 213

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

Rep. Jennifer Leeper, 132nd Dist.

Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill requires school districts to conduct the inspection and evaluation in at least 20% of their schools each year until all schools in the district are inspected. Upon the request of a school board, this bill allows DAS to grant a waiver to the inspection evaluation requirement at any time during the five-year window if it determines there is an insufficient number of inspection and evaluation professionals available to perform the work.

Additionally, this bill allows the DAS commissioner to award grants to reimburse the cost of performing the inspections and evaluations, provided this is the only grant under the program that can be awarded to a school district that is not in compliance with the IAQ inspection law.

Several studies have reported findings that have linked indoor air quality problems in schools to increased student absences due to respiratory infections, allergic responses, or adverse reactions to chemicals used in schools. Studies also find strong correlation between indoor air quality issue in schools and reduced student productivity, attention span, student academic performance, and reduced teacher and staff performance due to discomfort, sickness, or absences. Furthermore, there are substantial evidence that suggest students who are disproportionately harmed by inadequate HVAC systems in schools are children from low-income families and children of color, and virtually all studies on air quality in schools have found larger negative consequences of externalities among communities of color. This bill addresses these issues and intends to diminish disparities among low-income school districts to promote health and high academic achievement.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language of this bill extends the life of the task force to July 1, 2030, and requires annual progress reports before the final report in 2030.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[CT Department of Administrative Services, Commissioner, Michelle Gilman](#): expresses support for Sec. 1 stating they encourage further collaboration with the legislature, state agencies, and stakeholders as the working group extends for one year. They also report hearing feedback from districts about challenges they are facing in funding and completing the mandated 5-year evaluations and express concerns with the implementation of Sects. 2 and 3. They state they will continue to work with the proponents of this bill to refine these sections moving forward.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity \(CWCSEO\), Policy Analyst, TJ Nuccio](#): expresses support for this bill, citing a study that suggests poor air quality in the school environment is making children, teachers, and school staff sick. Furthermore, they report that poor air quality in schools negatively impacts students thinking and performance.

[Mechanical Contractors Association of CT, Executive Vice President, Kristen Abrahamson](#): expresses support for this bill stating that the working groups one year extension, until July 1, 2025, ensures that its final report will be comprehensive, science-based, and equitable for all whom their work impacts. They also express support for the provisions that allow boards of education to apply for reimbursement for the cost of conducting their 5-year HVAC inspections.

The following Directors of Facilities submitted testimony in support of this bill. expresses support for this bill; however, they address concerns that the implementation of this bill has caused major budget concerns for school districts and municipalities. Instead of requiring that all school buildings complete an HVAC study with a test adjust and balance contractor (TAB) in conjunction with a mechanical engineer all in one year and every five years, they propose to complete 20% of each of the district buildings in five years to better balance budget requests and alleviate the strain on contractors. Furthermore, they express concerns with testing buildings built under older code cycles and ASHRAE standards, stating this will be a heavy financial burden for districts to improve HVAC to current standards.

[Newtown Public Schools, Directors of Facilities, John Barlow](#)
[East Lyme Public Schools, Director of Facilities, Christian Lund](#)

The following teachers submitted testimony in support of this bill. They express strong support for this bill stating they, along with some of their students, are having significant respiratory issues as a consequence of the poor air quality in their schools. They note that poor air quality correlates both to health and academic performance, citing

various studies that suggest improvements in air quality result in improved student academic performance and decreases in absenteeism.

[Elizabeth Green School, Newington Special Education Teacher, Jennifer Bates](#)
[Oliver Ellsworth School, Windsor Special Education Teacher, Stefanie Dominguez](#)
[Oliver Ellsworth School, Windsor Teacher, Melissa Lafayette](#)
[Bunnell High School, Stratford Physics Teacher, Kristen Ann Record](#)
[Oliver Ellsworth School, Windsor Teacher, Rosanna Wilson](#)
[Oliver Ellsworth School, Speech-Language Pathologist, Lisa Siana](#)
[Oliver Ellsworth School, Windsor Teacher, Anonymous](#)

[Connecticut Education Association, Intern, Julie Budney](#): expresses support for this bill stating that in their professional duties they have visited seven schools in six school districts and have received feedback from over 100 teachers and support staff, 75% of those have reported issues with indoor air quality including respiratory illnesses.

[Connecticut Education Association, Legislative Coordinator, Louis Rosado Burch](#): expresses support for this bill stating it provides necessary improvements to the State's school air quality inspection and grant programs and helps to provide flexibility and equity in decisions related to HVAC funding. They also express several solutions to concerns made by other testimony, such as allowing for the cost of the 5-year HVAC inspection to be eligible for reimbursement under the DAS grant program, ensuring that each school board provides for the uniform inspection of 20% of schools each year, and extending the reporting date of the official School IAQ Task Force to July 1, 2025.

[CT American Lung Association, Advocacy Director, Ruth Canovi](#): expresses support for this bill and cites several studies that have linked indoor air quality problems in schools to increased student absences due to respiratory infections, allergic responses, or adverse reactions to chemicals used in schools; reduced student productivity, attention span, and academic performance; and reduced teacher and staff performance due to discomfort, sickness, or absences. They note that taking steps to address air quality issues in schools can make a big difference in the health and success of students, faculty, and staff.

The following residents submitted testimony in support of this bill. They encourage the committee to include language that incentivizes energy efficient heat pumps as the means to provide heating and cooling to help mitigate climate change.

[Hamden Resident, Matthew Cole](#)
[Fairfield Resident, Mary Hogue](#)
[Resident, Geraldine Koppe](#)

The following Superintendents submitted testimony in support of this bill. They highlight the revisions made to Sec. 1 pertaining to the Working Group's extended deadline of July 1, 2025. They state this will allow more time for comprehensive study and recommendations.

[Derby Public Schools, Superintendent of Schools, Matt Conway](#)
[Stamford Public Schools, Superintendent, Tamu Lucero](#)

CT Roundtable on Climate Jobs, Executive Director, Aziz Dehkan: expresses support for this bill stating it represents a crucial step forward in safeguarding the health and performance of CT's students and educators while addressing concerns about existing statutory requirements.

CT Association of School Business Officials, Director of Government Affairs, Sherri Dinello: expresses support for this bill, highlighting the provisions that allow the cost of performing the uniform inspection and evaluation of HVAC systems to be reimbursable, that extend the deadline and allow districts to inspect 20% of their schools each year, that adds language providing an opportunity to apply for a waiver, and that allows a mechanical contractor licensed in HVAC systems to perform the inspections and evaluations.

CT Coalition for Healthy School Environments, Member, Kenny Foscue: expresses support for this bill stating that it will help HVAC contractors tasked with conducting inspections and facilitating corrective repairs as they are in need of flexibility.

CT Council of Small Towns, Executive Director, Betsy Gara: expresses support for this bill, highlighting the provisions that extend the Working Group's deadline by one year and stagger inspection requirements over a 5-year period.

The following organization leaders submitted testimony in support of this bill. They note that a third of public-school buildings in CT have inadequate HVAC systems and urge the Legislature to pass this bill.

Foundation for Fair Contracting, Director, Kimberly Glassman

CT AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne

CT Association of Boards of Education, Windsor BoE Member, Leonard Lockhart

The Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Assoc. (SMACNA), Owner, Michael Mauro

United Association Local 777, Business Manager, Michael Rosario

CT Citizen Action Group, Organizer, Angel Serrano

The CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM), Advocacy Manager, Lindsay Seti

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, President, Travis Woodward

Ledyard High School, Student, Jessie Jackson: expresses support for this bill, noting the various HVAC issues in their own high school, including extremely uncomfortable room temperatures.

CT American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Policy Counsel, Jess Zaccagnino: expresses support for this bill, highlighting that the students who are disproportionately harmed by inadequate HVAC systems in schools are children from low-income families and children of color. They state that there is substantial evidence that unsafe and uncomfortable learning environments adversely impact students, and virtually all studies on air quality in schools have found larger negative consequences of externalities among communities of color.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:

RA United Enterprises, Founder & CEO, Rebecca Austin: encourages the Legislature to allocate \$15 million from the Indoor Air Quality Grant Program to help install air purifiers in more than 300 CT schools. They state this program could be administered by utilizing existing state vendors such as Grainger, Safeware, and MSC Direct, to allow for quick and easy implementation, and satisfy the need for an RFP or bid. Finally, they state that air purifiers can also help gather critical data on the HVAC needs of schools by requiring schools to first report on building age, existing HVAC systems, and recent upgrades.

Ledyard High School, Student, Parker Widlicka: expresses opposition to this bill; however, they state support of regularly servicing HVAC systems to increase the air quality in schools, which would make the learning environment more comfortable for all students.

Reported by: James Magson

Date: 3/25/24