

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-961

AN ACT CONCERNING CARBON-FREE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND ESTABLISHING OTHER SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL

Title: DISTRICTS.

Vote Date: 3/10/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/15/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To require the use of project labor agreements when certain solar and energy efficiency projects are required of school districts and to require certain measures by the Department of Public Health concerning air quality and drinking water in school settings.

Substitute Language LCO 5780

Limited application of the PLA requirements to projects over \$10M and added requirements concerning payment of prevailing wage. Eliminated board and gave board responsibilities to the Green Bank. Increased capitalized funds from \$200M to \$400M from the Green Bank, added provision designating funds for credit worthiness of school districts and added requirement to share water quality information with applicable water system authority.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Manisha Juthani, MD, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

DPH supports SB 961 but has some concerns. DPH's Voluntary Lead Testing of Drinking Water in Schools Program will launch this year under the EPA Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act. {WIN Act}. The WIN Act authorized states to establish a voluntary grant program to assist local schools, tribal educational agencies and childcare programs in testing for lead in drinking water. DPH states writing regulations and having them adopted by January 1, 2024, is not feasible. The regulatory process takes much longer than 6 months from beginning to end. Should the proposed legislation move forward, DPH requests at least 1 year to have regulations outlined in this bill implemented.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

James Desantos, Legislative Liaison & Associate Director of Regulatory Policy, CT Green Bank

CT Green Bank supports SB 961 in achieving carbon free schools through the deployment of renewable energy and the implementation of energy efficiency upgrades but has concerns on elements of the bill that may impact similar programs already in operation or duplicate similar efforts that have already been conducted and the scale and identification of the proposed funding sources. The Green Bank request the opportunity to be a part of future discussions and negotiations on this legislation.

Ann Gadwah, Advocacy & Outreach Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut

Sierra Club supports SB 961. This bill will help the state reach its greenhouse gas reduction targets through building decarbonization. School energy improvements protect public health. Upgrading HVAC systems and improving building envelopes can improve indoor air quality. Energy efficiency and rooftop projects and save school districts money and these school improvements will create jobs.

Robert Lafrance, Director of Policy, Audubon Connecticut

The Audubon Society supports SB 961 as a practical mechanism for making certain that capital investments in our public schools consider the feasibility and cost effectiveness of utilizing a renewable energy source to power such new construction. They also support the concept of a solar power feasibility study for existing school buildings and prioritizing "projects by greenhouse gas emissions reductions and cost-effectiveness and first undertake the project that offers the best combination of such factors."

Alex Rodriguez, Environmental Justice Specialist, Save the Sound

Save the Sound supports SB 961 because it relates of advancing climate action and improving the health and resiliency of communities statewide. The bill would require net-zero construction of new schools and major renovations, as well as for applications for state school construction grants to demonstrate how new buildings will be net-zero to the extent practicable. Also, public schools would require posting anti-idling signs in student pick-up and drop-off zones, maintain a safe class climate in classrooms, test drinking water and cooking water for lead and remediate lead contamination, and consider solid waste management in designing new schools.

Erika Scheffer Associate Director, Government Relations, Carrier Corporation

NORESCO, part of the Carrier Global Corp., and energy services company, that helps clients adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change by decarbonizing, modernizing and electrifying aging infrastructure to be more sustainable and resilient while developing creative funding options, they support SB 961 with the Amendment which is "And consider Energy Services Performance Contracting as an acceptable and encouraged method of procurement for installation to reduce life-cycle costs and risk to the school district".

Leslie Blatteau, President, New Haven Federation of Teachers

The New Haven Federation of Teachers supports SB 961 for a wide range of reasons but the main reason being that we must take concrete steps to address the current climate crisis. But not only that, this bill will potentially help with energy costs, educational benefits, and public health benefits. According to a study from the American Federations of Teachers, poor building conditions are cited as one reason teachers chose to leave teaching.

Louis Rosado Burch, CT Education Association, CGA Environment Committee

CEA supports SB 961. This bill is complementary to ongoing efforts to improve air quality in our school buildings by prioritizing low carbon, high efficiency facility improvements and providing critical funding and support to get the work done. It establishes optimal indoor temperature ranges for school facilities, which are critical to ensure safe indoor environments that are protective of students and teachers health. These guidelines will help us obtain a clearer picture of the need for school HVAC upgrades. Climate change is going to impact our schools and their ability to provide safe, healthy learning spaces for our children.

Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director, Connecticut Roundtable on Climate & Jobs

The Connecticut Roundtable on Climate & Jobs supports SB 961 because it represents a critical step forward in a just transition to clean energy economy. Not only are out public school's significant emitters of greenhouse gases, but their condition affects the health and well-being of the students. Also, the teachers, administrators, and staff have the right to a safe and healthy work environment free of suffering from "sick building syndrome." SB 961 would help update school facilities through projects like boiler replacements, building control upgrades, LED lighting retrofits, and building envelope upgrades that can remediate hazards like mold and asbestos while reducing heating and cooling costs.

Robbie Goodrich, Executive Director, R.A.C.C.E

Mr. Goodrich supports SB 961 provided an opportunity for a myriad of best practices to take hold in communities just like Waterbury with a minimum investment and some matching federal incentives. We are fighting for an equitable school funding model so that Waterbury families can access a high-quality education in their district. They currently have their own air monitoring project but its difficult to carry as a small grassroots organization.

Kimberly Glassman, Director, Foundation For Fair Contracting Of Connecticut, INC.

The Foundation for Fair Contracting of CT supports SB 961. Our teachers, faculty, students, staff, and administrators all deserve to spend their days in a healthy environment. Likewise, school building and renovation projects should create good-paying jobs and pathways to careers in the building and construction trades. PLAs establish safe working conditions and rules, project execution an accountability on the job, and procedures for resolving labor disputes. They often ensure that complex projects are completed on-time and on-budget. Also, PLAs protect workers' safety, pay, and benefits.

Scott Guilmartin, Partner, NuPower, LLC

NuPower supports SB 961 We encourage you to also include direct heating as a means of meeting the goals and requirements in the bill. NuPower is currently operating a thermal loop as part of combined heat and power project at the Charter Oak School in Bridgeport. Our company has also worked with the legislature to establish a "pilot" project to develop a district heating district in Bridgeport. Schools connected to a district heating loop achieve the intent of the legislation.

Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO

Connecticut AFL-CIO supports SB 961 because it would allow schools to be updated through projects that include mold and asbestos remediation, heating, ventilation, and HVAC system upgrades, water testing and lead remediation projects, and classroom temperature mandates. It will also help with rising energy costs and create jobs and workforce development opportunities in our community.

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, CT Association of Public School Superintendents

The CT Association of Public-School Superintendents support SB 961. In January 2023, CAPSS updated its Public Policy Agenda & Blueprint Update 2023 which included student health and safety as one of its "Educational Equity, Achievement & Innovation Priorities." These bills intentions are to improve school learning environments with school district requirements that might be supplementarily funded with loans (not grants). The bill, as of January 1, 2025, would set temperature limits. While the bill does not mention required closures (only the temperature limits), if emergency closures occur due to these limits, CAPSS does request that the State consider providing local boards of education the discretionary power to offer remote learning (for a total of three days due to emergency closures).

Tim Morse, Ph.D, Connecticut Resident

Mr. Morse is the Chair of the Climate Reality Project Southern CT Chapter supports SB 961. Net zero buildings are an increasingly important and achievable component of moving that state towards our climate goals, and schools are excellent candidates for this designation due to their large capacity for roof-based solar installation.

Rick Newton, Connecticut Resident

Mr. Newton supports SB 961 because small towns in CT lack the resources to make the needed changes to their school infrastructure. Also, he believes they should post No Idling signs at the school pick up lines.

Several speakers sent in testimony in support of SB 961 because there is a need at the state level to move our public schools to reduce their carbon footprint, protect the health of teachers and students, save money, create jobs and utilize renewable energy sources for new and existing buildings.

John Brady, Executive Vice President, AFTCT

Keith Brothers, Business Manager, Connecticut Laborer's District Council

Susan Eastwood, CGA Environment Committee

Carol Gale, President, of the Harford Federation of Teachers

Riena Harker, Policy Fellow, Yale Center on Climate Change and Health

Justin Kelley, Political Director, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades

Dan McInerney, Business Manager, IBEW Local Union 488

Elizabeth Raisbeck, Co-chair, Groton Conservation Advocates

Joseph Toner, Executive Director, CT Building Trades

Tom Swan, Executive Director, CT Citizens Action Groton

Over 30 Connecticut State Residents sent in Testimony in Support of SB 961

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Leslie Anderson, President & CEO, The Propane Gas Association of New England

The Propane Gas Association of New England oppose SB 961, because it seeks to promote electricity at the expense of propane systems and because it does not advance economic security or climate objectives. Propane systems are more efficient and less costly to consumers than heat pumps and other electric technology. Renewable propane energy is already being added to conventional propane and we expect propane to continue to be cleaner than electricity. Today renewable propane is created during renewable biodiesel refining.

Michael Colossale, Vice President, Colossale Concrete, Inc

Mr. Colossale opposes SB 961 because he feels by mandating PLA on school construction projects would cripple his company but most likely must move to another state where we could operate under "Fair" and competitive bidding processes. He feels that PLA projects drive the cost of construction up considerably just to accommodate a small portion of the industry at the expense of the majority.

Christopher Fryxell, President, Associated Builders & Contractors

The Associated Builders & Contractor of CT oppose SB 961. The goal of reducing carbon emissions is important, and one that our diverse network of local contractors supports. ABC members have invested in and developed a well-trained workforce, utilize state-registered apprenticeship programs, treat safety with the utmost importance and have a great deal of experience working on the very types of carbon-reducing and energy-efficiency projects described in this bill. They oppose SB 961 because the government mandated PLA required in this bill will prevent our membership from having a fair opportunity to compete for this important work.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST

COST opposes SB 961 as drafted because it requires local and regional boards of education to meet certain air quality standards, including mandatory temperature/humidity ranges. The fiscal note will result in a state mandate and significant costs to local and regional school districts. COST supports provisions in Governor Lamont's proposed budget which targets \$150,000M in funding to upgrade HVAC systems in their schools to improve air quality. Also, COST opposes to mandate that school construction be built to net-zero energy standards and subject to mandatory project labor agreements

Donna Hamzy Carroccia, Chief Strategy Officer of CCM.

CCM has concerns with SB 961 as it would impose additional mandates on towns and cities, a) requiring solar feasibility studies for schools, 2) requiring school construction to be built to net-zero energy standard, 3) requiring project labor agreements, and 4) requiring temperature settings in schools.

Leonard Lockhart, First Vice President, CABE

CABE opposes SB 961 as it places additional reporting burdens on school districts. Districts will seek guidance on having to comply "to the greatest extent possible."

Several speakers sent in testimony in opposition to SB 961. They object to the mandate that requires that school construction be subject to Project Labor Agreements.

Jennifer Jennings, Executive Director, CT Heating and Cooling Contractors

Jeffrey Leone, CEO, Air Temp Mechanical Services

Timothy Obrien, Executive VP, CFO KBE Building Corporation

Meghan Portfolio, Manager of Research & Analysis, Yankee Institute

Victor Serrambana, President, VMS Construction Company

Larry Vallieres, Government Relations Chair, Independent Electrical Contractors of New England

Ashley Zane, Public Policy Associate, CBIA

Reported by: Judith Ganswindt

Date: March 17, 2023