

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1198

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

Title: INDOOR AIR QUALITY WORKING GROUP.

Vote Date: 3/24/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/15/2023

File No.: 569

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

Rep. Jennifer Leeper, 132nd Dist.

Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Many public schools throughout Connecticut are impacted by poor indoor air quality, which can have major negative effects on the health and wellbeing of students and staff. Connecticut educators have testified that hazards such as broken heating and cooling systems, poor ventilation, and mold continue to jeopardize their students' health and ability to learn. This bill will address these issues by implementing several recommendations of the School Indoor Air Quality Working Group to improve and maintain indoor air quality in public schools.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

In section 3, lines 138-139, the substitute language makes the indoor air quality walkthrough inspection an annual requirement, rather than every three years as under existing laws. More frequent inspections will help ensure and maintain healthy indoor air quality in schools. In section 5, line 271, the substitute language changes the optimal thermal temperature range from regulations to guidelines.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Administrative Services; supports Section 1 of the bill, which extends the timeline for the Working Group and Section 4, which authorizes \$300 million new dollars for

school air quality improvement grants. The testimony further states that DAS has unspecified concerns about Sections 2 and 3 of the bill.

Department of Public Health, Commissioner, Manisha Juthani; states that DPH supports the bill's intention to improve indoor air quality in schools, but expresses concern over several aspects of the bill, including the unbudgeted fiscal impact to DPH for developing regulations and a lack of guidance on compliance and enforcement.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO), Children's Policy Analyst, TJ Nuccio; supports the bill, stating that hundreds of CT schools have ventilation and HVAC systems that are in need of repair to improve indoor air quality and prevent negative health effects for students and staff.

Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Legislative Coordinator, Louis Rosado Burch; supports the bill, stating that students and staff are facing health issues such as asthma due to poor air quality in schools and that heating and HVAC systems must be repaired or replaced to limit these negative health effects. The testimony recommends that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*, while mandatory reporting to the state should be maintained at every five years.

**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, Executive Director, Aziz Dehkan; supports the bill, stating environmental hazards in Connecticut schools such as poor ventilation, extreme temperatures, and mold contribute to high rates of asthma and absences among students and staff. The testimony recommends that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*.

**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

East Hartford BOE, Chair-CABE BOD, Tyron Harris; supports the bill, stating that there is a need for a delay in reporting back to legislature due to the complexity of working towards an equitable solution.

Old Saybrook Public Schools, Superintendent, Jan Perruccio; supports the extension of the Indoor Air Quality Committee's work to address challenges with funding and supply for the replacement of air conditioning systems in CT schools.

Connecticut AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne; supports the bill but recommends that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*.

**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), Director of Government Affairs, David Lenihan; supports the bill and makes several additional recommendations, including that the legislature consider a five-year phase-in plan for the inspection and evaluation of HVAC systems, that HVAC upgrades be approved for school

construction grants, and that the School IAQ Working Group add a member from CASBO and a member from the CT School Building and Grounds Association (CSBGA).

Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), Executive Director, Glenn Lungarini; supports the bill and requests that that a representative of CAS be added to the working group.

Abrahamson, Kristen, Executive Vice President-Mechanical Contractors Association CT; supports this bill, stating that trade union HVAC contractors are qualified to maintain and improve indoor environmental conditions in schools across the state. The testimony gives additional recommendations, including that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*, for DAS to be able to grant waivers for the Jan. 2025 deadline in certain circumstances, and to authorize the State Bond Commission to issue \$375 million in bonds for the HVAC grant program over two years.
**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

Carrier Corporation, Associate Director of Governmental Affairs, Erika Scheffer; supports the bill, but recommends various amendments including that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*, that testing for additional hazards such as radon be included in inspections, and that additional regulations and standards be implemented in addition to temperature regulations.
**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

The Associated Sheet Metal & Roofing Contractors of Connecticut ASMRCC, Executive Director, Michael Thompson; supports the bill, stating that trade union HVAC contractors are qualified and ready to help repair and replace HVAC systems in CT schools.

CT State Building Trades Council, Executive Director, Joe Toner; supports the bill, stating that COVID-19 has increased the need for safe air quality measures in CT schools. Recommends that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*, but that mandatory reporting to the state be maintained at every 5 years.
**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

ACLU CT, Policy Counsel, Jess Zaccagnino; supports the bill, stating that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing issues in the ventilation systems of CT schools and that unsafe and uncomfortable learning environments negatively impact the health and learning of children. The testimony further states that studies show children from communities of color are more affected by the negative impacts of unhealthy school air quality.

CT Citizen Action Group, Associate Director, Liz Dupont-Diehl; supports the bill, stating that the bill is needed because 68% of schools in Connecticut have reported indoor air quality problems. The testimony recommends that the bill be modified to increase the frequency of walkthrough inspections from every 3 years to once annually*; that such inspections be required for all schools, not just those constructed or renovated after January 2003; and that a clear start date be specified for inspections required under section 3(2).
**The substitute language for this bill addresses this recommendation.*

Resident, Kenny Foscue; supports the bill, stating that there is a need for required annual walkthrough inspections in all Connecticut schools to check for environmental hazards such as ventilation blockages or mold.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Thomaston Board of Education, Chairperson, Ruthann Fainer; opposes the bill, stating that the bill is unnecessary because there are already professional standards and reporting requirements in place which school districts are required to follow. The testimony further states that the additional requirements introduced in the bill would add burdensome financial and reporting duties to CT school districts.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:

Derby Public Schools, Superintendent, Matt Conway; supports increased funding to upgrade HVAC system, but states concern that until schools have updated their systems, the proposed thermal range regulations could result in school closures which may extend the school year beyond the statutory June 30th date.

Town of Coventry, Town Manager, Elsesser, John and CT Conference of Municipalities, Mike Muszynski; state support for the bill's intent to extend and expand the charge of the school indoor air quality working group and to develop a portal for indoor air quality inspection reports. The testimonies further advocate for increased funding in the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system grant program and for HVAC upgrades to be made eligible for the School Construction Grant Program.

COST, Executive Director, Betsy Gara; states support for increased funding to upgrade HVAC systems, but states concern that language in Section 1 may prevent many communities from receiving funding. Also states support for extending the working group's deadline and the establishment of an online portal for school indoor air quality reports but recommends that the optimal thermal comfort range for school buildings be made more flexible to prevent unnecessary school closures.

Reported by: Sean McMillan

Date: 4/17/2023