

March 18, 2025

Written comments from the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Good afternoon to the committee and Mr. Chairman, my name is Alexa Jordan and I am here on behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (or “AAFA”) to share my testimony in support of H5597, Ensuring Clean Indoor Air in Rhode Island Schools. I want to thank Representative Cotter for introducing this essential piece of legislation.

AAFA is the leading patient organization advocating for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. AAFA is dedicated to saving lives and reducing the burden of disease for the 100 million people in the United States with these chronic conditions.

At AAFA, we believe that our children should be focused on learning at school, not struggling to breathe. **For the one in ten children in Rhode Island living with asthma**, that struggle can feel like trying to breathe through a narrow straw.

When indoor air quality is poor, common asthma triggers like dust, mold, and poor ventilation can worsen symptoms, making it harder for students to focus, participate, and stay at school. In fact, roughly one in six school absences is the result of asthma.

Rhode Island faces a serious childhood asthma crisis, ranking 40% higher than the national average for rates of childhood asthma. In our 2024 Asthma Capitals research report, **Providence ranked in the top 10 most challenging cities to live with asthma**. We base this metric on three health outcomes: prevalence, asthma-related ED visits, and asthma-related mortality rates. Nationwide, nearly 10 people lose their lives to asthma every day. Taking action to minimize the risk factors that exacerbate this chronic condition can help prevent severe outcomes for students and their teachers.

Improving indoor air quality in our schools is an accessible step that can prevent severe outcomes for children suffering with asthma, improve school attendance, boost academic achievement, and support teacher health. States across the country have taken this step, including California, Nevada, Oregon, and Connecticut. In Rhode Island, implementing these air quality measures would simply build upon existing survey processes and identify issues related to ventilation, filtration, carbon dioxide levels, and airborne pollutants. Following in the footsteps of other states, H5597 proactively addresses poor air quality before it increases long-term facility costs or long-term health issues for teachers and students.

When we spend nearly 90% of our time indoors, good air quality is a necessity for health. Students and teachers spend approximately 7 hours of their day in school, and it is essential that this time is spent in a healthy environment, especially for the two students per classroom in Rhode Island that have asthma.

When indoor air quality is improved, students with asthma have one less barrier to fully participating in their education. We welcome any questions and do ask the committee to vote in favor of this bill.



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