

Via Electronic Mail

March 18, 2025

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara
Chair, House Committee on Education
Room 101, State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 5597 – Health and Safety of Pupils

Dear Chair McNamara:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill No. 5597, which would create air quality standards and provide for infrastructure improvements in schools. Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) supports this bill and wishes to thank its sponsors for their attention to this important issue.

CLF is a member-supported non-profit advocacy organization working to protect public health and the environment and build healthy communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England. Through our advocacy work with community leaders in environmental justice communities in Providence, CLF is aware of the link between poor air quality and elevated instances of medical problems, including asthma, that lead to school absences.¹

Children in Rhode Island suffer from asthma rates that are 40% higher than the national average.² Unfortunately, instead of being a healthy environment for all children, much of our aging school infrastructure is replete with poor ventilation and outdated HVAC systems. Poor air quality impacts all of our children, not just those with asthma. Children at schools along busy roads struggle to focus after breathing in vehicle exhaust all day, while others face increased respiratory infections.³ To combat chronic absenteeism and improve student performance and teacher retention, schools must have healthy air quality.

H-5597 would establish basic indoor air quality standards in Rhode Island schools and require improvements where necessary. By empowering the Department of Education to establish air

¹ See, e.g., *Breathe Providence*, <https://www.breatheprovidence.com/> (accessed Mar. 18, 2025).

² Rhode Island Department of Health Air Quality Fact Sheet, <https://health.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur1006/files/publications/brochures/climatechange/AirQuality.pdf>, (accessed Mar. 18, 2025).

³ Fisk W. J. (2017). The ventilation problem in schools: literature review. *Indoor air*, 27(6), 1039–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ina.12403>

quality standards, conduct regular evaluations, and require infrastructure tune-ups, this bill offers evidence-based solutions to poor air quality.

All children deserve a healthy environment in which to learn and grow. H-5597 is a necessary step for improving indoor air quality in Rhode Island schools, and CLF therefore respectfully urges its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,



Erin Ritter
Program Coordinator, CLF Rhode Island

cc: Members of the House Committee on Corporations
Representative Edith H. Ajello
Representative Brandon Potter
Representative Lauren Carson
Representative David A. Bennett
Representative Grace Diaz
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation