



RHODE ISLAND
 FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
 HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ^{AFT}_{AFL - CIO}

To: House Education Committee
 From: Frank Flynn
 Date: April 12, 2021
 RE: Health and Safety - **Air Quality in Schools**
 Testimony in **support** of 2021-H 5935

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals supports H 5935, introduced by Representative Ranglin-Vassell. This bill will mandate annual air quality testing, both internal and external, in every school in Rhode Island.

Over the past five years there has been a concerted effort to remodel or rebuild the aging school buildings in Rhode Island. The Jacobs Report analyzed every school building in our state and illustrated how unsafe and deficient so many of our schools were. It was determined that for all schools to be upgraded to “warm, safe, and dry” condition would require a commitment of over two billion dollars. One of the major areas of concern identified by the report were deficiencies in air quality.

A task force was formed and a committee with stakeholders from all sectors of the school community participated. The results of the committee’s work led to a proposal for the state to bond \$250 million which passed in 2019. Many school districts in our state have begun the process to renovate and rebuild their buildings.

While improving school infrastructure has been a major initiative the current pandemic illustrated the need for a system to test and analyze the air quality in our school buildings. The spread of the airborne Covid 19 virus and the inability to mitigate the spread of the virus due to the lack of appropriate technology, was a major factor in the closing of schools last spring and delayed reopening this school year.

Under current Rhode Island Law 16-21-3, “It shall be the responsibility of the local fire chief, the local building inspector, the director of the department of health, and the director of the department of labor and training to determine and notify each local school superintendent or private school official by August 1 of each year as to whether the...school buildings conform to appropriate state law and regulations.”

This bill would extend the requirements in RIGL 16-21-3 to include annual air quality tests to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff. I would like to recommend that the legislation be expanded to specifically include testing in multiple sites within each building to provide a more comprehensive report.

We appreciate Representative Ranglin-Vassell’s advocacy on this important bill and urge your **support of H 5935**.

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