

Subject: Support for House Bill 7582

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Evan Tao, a Providence resident, and I am writing in strong support of House Bill 7582. Air pollution in our schools harms children's health and learning, making them more likely to be absent from school due to illness. Children are particularly vulnerable to poor indoor air quality, since their growing bodies are more sensitive to pollutants and they breathe a larger proportion of air relative to their body size. Rhode Island has one of the highest asthma rates in the country, impacting 8.5% of children and 12.2% of adults, disproportionately in low-income communities and communities of color. Poor indoor air quality in schools and its associated impacts are crucial environmental justice issues that we can and must solve.

Key provisions in the bill include:

- **State Guidance on Indoor Air Quality:** Many school districts and health departments nationwide already publish voluntary indoor air quality guidelines that are clear and easy to follow. Establishing state-level guidance in Rhode Island would provide districts and schools with much-needed information they can use to improve air quality.
- **Upgrading to MERV-13 Filters:** MERV-13 is the nationally recommended minimum standard for school HVAC filters. While Rhode Island currently requires MERV-11 filters in new school buildings, upgrading to MERV-13 filters offers significantly better protection against particulate pollution, dust, mold, allergens, and pathogens.
- **Routine HVAC and indoor air quality inspections:** Regular HVAC and air quality inspections are essential to school maintenance and should occur every few years. States such as Connecticut and California have already implemented programs to ensure schools meet air quality standards. Rhode Island can do the same by incorporating indoor air quality assessments into facilities inspections every 5 years.

By passing House Bill 7582, Rhode Island has an opportunity to take meaningful, low-cost, evidence-based steps to improve indoor air quality in schools. I urge you to support this bill and prioritize the health and wellbeing of students, teachers, and families.

Sincerely,
Evan Tao