

April 28, 2026

State of Rhode Island General Assembly
House Finance Committee
State House, 82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Subject: Support for House Bill H7582

Dear Chairman Abney, First Vice Chair Slater, Second Vice Chair Marszalkowski, and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Natalie Kopp, former White House Adviser on pandemic response and indoor air quality. I write in full support of H7582.

I'd like to briefly address the three most important components of this bill and then share an excerpt from an article I wrote in the Boston Globe on indoor air quality in RI schools.

- 1) **Department of Health (RIDoH) establishing indoor air quality recommendations for schools.** RIDoH had similar recommendations posted for indoor spaces during the pandemic. They should take into account the uniqueness of school buildings and look at the latest research but this should not be a heavy lift. Further, there are national school organizations that already have school-focused recommendations for these metrics.
- 2) **Adding more vigorous inspections of indoor air quality into the inspections already taking place every five years.** The School Board Authority and RIDE have just completed one such study so they will have another five years to incorporate this addition to the inspections.
- 3) **Upgrading air filtration when possible.** This does not mean changing any infrastructure. It means, if you have an HVAC system that can take a MERV 13 filter but you're currently using a MERV 8, you should upgrade to a MERV 13 (or even MERV 11 if that's all the system can handle). MERV 13's cost a few dollars more (I mean that literally) and increase energy costs minimally. The benefits far outway these minimal investments and is the right thing to do for our kids.

Below is an excerpt from an article I co-authored in the Boston Globe in March of 2025 entitled "[RI should lead by example and prioritize clean air in our schools.](#)"

“Rhode Island’s aging school infrastructure is failing our kids — one breath at a time. According to a 2021 report led by then state treasurer, Representative Seth Magaziner, most schools in our state are over [five decades old](#).

Poor ventilation, outdated HVAC systems, and aging infrastructure [negatively affect the health](#) and [performance of our children and teachers](#). While many priorities compete for attention in school construction and renovation, few have a more profound and lasting impact than improving indoor air quality.

The [evidence](#) of the benefits is overwhelming. The quality of the air in schools directly impacts [student absenteeism](#), performance, and teacher [retention](#). When classrooms have well-ventilated and filtered air, there are far [fewer respiratory infections](#) and less burden from chronic illnesses. In practical terms, this means students are less likely to be sick and will miss fewer school days. Additionally, cleaner air is linked to better [math and reading scores](#), improved concentration, enhanced cognitive function, and even improved [mental health](#).

The benefits go well beyond the classroom and right into our communities. Parents can focus on their work instead of caring for sick children at home, businesses gain a more reliable workforce, and our emergency departments are less burdened with preventable illnesses.”

I urge this committee to support H7582 and thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Natalie Kopp