



*Via Electronic Mail*

March 10, 2026

The Honorable Melissa A. Murray  
Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senate Lounge, State House  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: CLF **Supports** Senate Bill No. 2873 – Health and Safety of Pupils

Dear Chair Murray:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill No. 2873, 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.<sup>1</sup>

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a healthy environment for all children, much of our aging school infrastructure is replete with poor ventilation and outdated HVAC systems.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

S-2873 is an important, actionable first step in establishing basic indoor air quality standards in Rhode Island schools. It would require the Department of Health (“RIDOH”) to establish

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *Breath Providence*, <https://www.breathprovidence.com/> (last accessed Mar. 9, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health Air Quality Fact Sheet, <https://health.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur1006/files/publications/brochures/climatechange/AirQuality.pdf> (last accessed Mar. 9, 2026).

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

guidelines for indoor air quality in schools and the Department of Education (“RIDE”) to define an assessment method for air quality and ventilation system performance in school buildings. By incorporating that assessment into RIDE’s School Building Authority’s existing needs survey, S-2873 established a practical method of gathering relevant data.

S-2873 incorporates evidence-based actions to combat poor air quality. That includes requiring that existing HVAC systems be upgraded to MERV-13 filters—a widely endorsed best practice. It also gives RIDOH and RIDE one year to issue recommendations and investigate funding needs to improve school air quality.

All children deserve a healthy environment in which to learn and grow. S-2873 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  
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Louis P. DiPalma  
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation