

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Madison Bertotto. I am a resident of Providence, and I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 2873. This bill is a crucial step toward improving the health and wellbeing of students, teachers, and staff in schools across Rhode Island. All students deserve clean indoor air which is essential for student learning and health both in the short and long term. Yet, for decades, this issue has been vastly under-prioritized leading to decreased productivity and academic performance, the spread of airborne illnesses, and absenteeism and missed workdays. Students with asthma are more affected by air pollution and are hit especially hard by poor indoor air quality in schools. RI has one of the highest asthma rates in the country with 8.5% of children and 12.2% of adults impacted by the disease, 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 Senate Bill 2873, Rhode Island has an opportunity to take meaningful, 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,
Madison Bertotto