

Chairwoman and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 2873. My name is Natalie Kopp, and I work in public health and fundriasing with a focus on improving health outcomes for communities and especially for children.

I would first like to thank the sponsors of this legislation—Chairman DiPalma and Senators Thompson, Murray, Valverde, Ujifusa, and Lauria—for their continued leadership on this issue. I also want to thank the members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee for taking up legislation that addresses something so fundamental to the health and well-being of Rhode Island’s children.

Last year, many of us in the community submitted testimony in support of related legislation because indoor air quality in schools is one of the most overlooked public health issues affecting children today. Senate Bill 2873 continues that important work.

It’s a bill that is beyond reasonable. Most critically, it aligns with the state’s 5-year school inspection timeline—in reality, this work should be done much more often. It asks the state to establish thresholds that are recommendations only, not mandatory. It asks that MERV 13 filters be placed in units that can handle them, not to upgrade or install new units to meet this requirement. It asks that findings be communicated to decision-makers, not mandate how and when to fix the issues identified.

Rhode Island remains one of the worst places to live for those who suffer from asthma. The state is clearly committed to improving the school infrastructure and for that, I am grateful. For the older buildings especially, a little attention to this issue could make a very big difference for students, staff and teachers.

Last year, I co-authored an opinion piece in The Boston Globe with Dr. Ashish Jha, that discusses the importance of improving indoor air quality in Rhode Island schools and commissioning school ventilation systems statewide. That article may be helpful context for the committee as it considers this legislation:

“R.I. should lead by example and prioritize clean air in our schools”

The Boston Globe (Opinion), by Natalie Kopp and Ashish Jha

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/03/20/opinion/rhode-island-schools-indoor-air-quality/>

Clean air in schools a public health issue, an education issue, and most importantly, a children's health issue. Every child in Rhode Island deserves to breathe clean air in their classroom.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support Senate Bill 2873.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the health and well-being of Rhode Island's students.

Natalie Kopp