

TESTIMONY

Sierra Otilie-Kovelman

3/10/2026

S. 2873: Indoor Air Quality in Schools

Thank you, Chairwoman Murray, and good afternoon to the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sierra Otilie-Kovelman, I am an East Greenwich resident, a public health professional, and a gymnastics coach. I strongly support Bill 2873 on Indoor Air Quality for schools in Rhode Island. Today I am not here as a public health professional, but as a patient with severe asthma and allergies. Breathing is the first need we all have, every second of every day. For me, and the 28 million Americans nationwide who have asthma, breathing easily is not guaranteed, and is often a struggle. Every day, I wake up, and have to face my asthma - I get no choice or option in the matter. I wish that taking care of my lungs were as simple as taking my medications, but that is not even half the battle. What triggers my asthma can come from so many different sources - allergens, the environment, and especially the air. When you have the gift of not having to think about your breathing, you don't think about the air you breathe. For me, it's a much different world. Every aspect of the air around me matters - how hot it is, how humid it is. Last winter, I went on a 1-mile run in my neighborhood, being a lifelong athlete, and set off an asthma flare that lasted 4 months because of how dry and cold the air was. While the air outside matters, so does the air inside: in my apartment, at work, at the grocery store. I feel like a walking IAQ Geiger counter. The air too harsh, polluted? I need to literally leave the building. This gets in the way of activities that others often take for granted. I love to explore thrift stores in my free time, but the musty air usually keeps my visits short. There have been more times than I could count that I've gone thrifting with my boyfriend, started to feel wheezy, put on a mask, tried some puffs of my reliever, but had to stop my weekend fun early because of the air. I

have worked in buildings before that were out of date with inadequate filtration systems that set off an asthma attack. I would go to work, try my best to mitigate my symptoms, taking my rescue inhaler, even going so far as to bring my plug-in nebulizer and do loud uncomfortable 30 minute breathing treatments. These measures weren't always enough, and I had to leave work early for the day on several occasions. How would a child manage such a situation at school? That is a huge burden for someone who doesn't even know yet how to drive. Like having asthma, going to school wasn't a choice, wasn't optional. Imagine the building you went to school in was old, older than most, with an outdated HVAC system. Everyday you went to school, it was harder to breathe than it was at home. As a 10 year old? You have no agency or ability to change that. That is why this Bill in front of you today is so important: people with asthma like me rely on laws to protect us, to protect the air we live within. This Bill speaks to all parts of air quality that I need to be held to a standard - standards that don't exist in any state for any school currently. Being sent into a school that will literally make children sicker is incredibly difficult for a child and their family to manage, and is counterproductive for all of our futures'. I did not get to grow up in a school system that I knew was safe for my lungs, but this can change. We can materially improve lives by voting in favor of Bill 2873; vote in favor so that young Sierra could only have school to worry about at school; vote in favor so that the future of Rhode Island can too. Thank you.