



October 26, 2023

The Honorable John Jagler
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Room 131 South
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

The Honorable Romaine Robert Quinn
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Room 123 South
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Chair Jagler and Vice Chair Quinn,

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the leading patient organization advocating for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient organization in the world, I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 444, a bill to create a comprehensive indoor air quality program for public schools.

AAFA is dedicated to ensuring that all individuals have an optimal environment in which to live, learn, work and play. Indoor air pollution poses significant health risks: people spend an average of 90% of their time indoors and, according to the EPA, indoor air is more polluted than outside air.¹ Of particular concern to AAFA is the strong body of evidence demonstrating that poor indoor air quality (IAQ) increases risks of severe asthma attacks and allergic reactions.²

Since children spend much of their time in the school environment, school indoor air quality can significantly influence their respiratory health. According to the EPA, approximately 53 million children and 6 million adults in the United States spend a large portion of their days in schools.³ Research links key environmental factors to health outcomes and students' ability to perform. Improvements in

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Why Indoor Air Quality is Important in Schools" (Updated 2022). Available at <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/why-indoor-air-quality-important-schools>

² Tiotiu AI, Novakova P, Nedeva D, Chong-Neto HJ, Novakova S, Steiropoulos P, Kowal K. Impact of Air Pollution on Asthma Outcomes. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Aug 27;17(17):6212. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17176212. PMID: 32867076; PMCID: PMC7503605.

³ Environmental Protection Agency. Indoor Air: Improve Indoor Air Quality in Schools. http://www.epa.gov/airquality/community/details/i-schools_addl_info.html



school environmental quality can enhance academic performance, as well as teacher and staff productivity and retention.

Poor indoor air quality is a particular health concern for those with asthma and allergies because indoor triggers increase the risks of severe asthma attacks and allergic reactions.⁴ Nearly 1 in 13 school-aged children have asthma, which is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness. There is substantial evidence that indoor environmental exposure to allergens (such as dust mites, pests, and molds) plays a significant role in triggering asthma symptoms, and these allergens are common in schools.⁵ Other factors that contribute to poor indoor air quality in schools include:

- **Poor Ventilation & HVAC Systems** – Inadequate ventilation results in high levels of harmful airborne particulates and carbon dioxide levels. It also leads to mold and bacteria growth.
- **Aging Buildings** – Many school buildings have not been updated for decades. As a result, many schools have problems with leaks, water damage and excessive moisture – which lead to dust, mold and other airborne allergens that contribute to poor indoor air quality.
- **Schools Located Near Sources of Pollution** – Schools that are located in busy cities or near highways face significant fumes from exhaust and gases like carbon monoxide. Like other factors affecting school indoor air quality, school location plays a role in exacerbating racial and ethnic disparities in asthma for children. For example, 15% of schools serving mostly children of color are near major roads, compared to only 4% of schools serving predominantly white students.⁶

AAFA has championed indoor air quality for decades, and we strongly support this bill to improve indoor air quality in Wisconsin schools. While AAFA's 2019 State

⁴ Environmental Protection Agency. Questions about your Community: Indoor Air. <http://www.epa.gov/region1/communities/indoorair.html>

⁵ Esty B, Permaul P, DeLoreto K, Baxi SN, Phipatanakul W. Asthma and Allergies in the School Environment. *Clin Rev Allergy Immunol*. 2019 Dec;57(3):415-426. doi: 10.1007/s12016-019-08735-y. PMID: 31044354; PMCID: PMC6824974.

⁶ Hopkins, J.S. (2017, February 17). The invisible hazard afflicting thousands of schools. Center for Public Integrity. <https://publicintegrity.org/environment/the-invisible-hazard-afflicting-thousands-of-schools/>



Asthma and Allergy
Foundation of America

Honor Roll report notes that Wisconsin has taken steps to provide clean air in schools, S.B. 444 would take further positive actions to improve indoor air quality for children in Wisconsin public schools, including by mandating air quality inspections and requiring the development of plans to address any identified problems.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Jenna Riemenschneider at jennar@aafa.org with any questions.

Sincerely

Kenneth Mendez
President and Chief Executive Officer
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America