



March 18, 2025

State of Rhode Island General Assembly
House Committee on Education
State House, 82 Smith Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Subject: Support for [H5597](#): Ensuring Clean Indoor Air in Rhode Island Schools

Dear Chair McNamara and Honorable Members of House Education Committee,

We are writing as a group of organizations and urge you to support and advance House Bill 5597 by Representative Cotter, a critical step toward ensuring that Rhode Island's schools provide healthy, safe, and equitable learning environments for all students and educators. Clean indoor air is fundamental to student health, academic performance, and attendance, yet too many Rhode Island schools continue to struggle with inadequate ventilation and poor indoor air quality.

The science is clear: cleaner indoor air supports student health, learning, and well-being. Decades of research show that poor indoor air quality in schools contributes to increased absenteeism,

worsened asthma and respiratory conditions, and decreased educational performance and test scores. Proper ventilation can reduce the transmission of airborne illnesses by up to 80% and increase the number of students passing standardized math and reading tests by 3%. Asthma is responsible for roughly one in six student absences.

Rhode Island has made significant progress in upgrading school infrastructure, yet many schools still lack adequate ventilation and protection against airborne pollutants and infectious diseases. The average school building is over 50 years old, and roughly half of our schools don't have HVAC systems. Most schools achieve only 1 to 2 air changes per hour, far below the recommended 5.

We have a historic opportunity to prioritize clean indoor air in every school. The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education has approved more than \$5 billion in school construction projects, enabled by strong leadership from the Rhode Island legislature, Governor McKee, and the School Building Authority. Additionally, the "Attendance Matters RI" campaign, spearheaded by Governor McKee, is making progress in reducing chronic absenteeism, to which poor indoor air quality significantly contributes. Legislation will enhance and enable this work to continue now and for years to come.

Over a dozen states have recently passed legislation to advance cleaner indoor air in schools, and Rhode Island can follow suit. Connecticut conducts annual indoor air quality inspections and HVAC inspections every 5 years. California requires schools to install MERV 13 filters. Delaware directed its public health department to establish an indoor air quality monitoring program and set standards for schools. By adopting the policies outlined in H5597, Rhode Island would follow national best practices and join the growing number of states taking proactive steps to ensure safe, healthy indoor air in schools.

H5597 will help ensure Rhode Island's schools have clean indoor air by establishing state guidelines for indoor air quality, setting higher filtration standards, and inspecting indoor air quality in schools.

We urge you to champion H5597 and help ensure its swift passage.

Sincerely,

Organizations in Support:

Aircense

American Academy of Pediatrics, Rhode Island Chapter

American Lung Association

ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers)

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, New England Chapter

Breathe Providence, Brown University

Change the Air Foundation

CO Safe Schools

Erlab

Global Open Air Quality Standards

International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers

Oasis International – Providence

Poppy Health Inc

Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals

Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals

Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition

Rhode Island Kids Count

Rhode Island Medical Society Planetary Health Committee

SafeTraces

The Ocean Project

The Safer Air Project

Individuals in Support:

Alexandra DeShaw | Boston University

B. Levow | Resident

Daniel Fitzgerald, MPH, ICPS | Director of Advocacy in Rhode Island, American Lung Association

David Bell | CEO, Aircense

Dr. Karen Maule | RI Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Dyanne Vilenos | Parent

Georgia Lagoudas, PHD | Senior Fellow, Brown University School of Public Health

Gina Mazza | Community Member

Holly M Nagib | Former PPSD Parent

Karina Holyoak Wood | Resident

Kristen DeShaw | Parent

Lisa Greenfield | Erlab USA

Natalie Kopp | Director of Strategic Priorities, Brown University School of Public Health

Sabrina Chwalek, Visiting Fellow, Brown Pandemic Center