



March 10, 2026

Senator Melissa A. Murray, Chair
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Letter of Support for S 2873

Dear Chair Murray and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) I am writing in support of S 2873, Relating to Education – Health and Safety of Pupils. We appreciate the Committee's support of a similar bill last year by moving it out of Committee to the full Senate for a vote.

S. 2873 is a comprehensive, science-based approach to protecting Rhode Island's schoolchildren from the health harms of poor indoor air quality. It establishes clear standards, creates accountability through systematic assessment and public reporting, requires meaningful filtration improvements, and takes effect immediately.

AAFA is the leading patient organization advocating for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. AAFA is dedicated to saving lives and reducing the burden of disease for the 100 million people in the United States with these chronic conditions.

At AAFA, we believe that our children should be focused on learning at school, not struggling to breathe. Asthma is a top reason for missed school days. **For the one in ten children in Rhode Island living with asthma,**¹ that struggle can feel like trying to breathe through a narrow straw.

When indoor air quality is poor, common asthma triggers like dust, mold, and poor ventilation can worsen symptoms, making it harder for students to focus, participate, and stay at school. In fact, roughly one in six school absences is the result of asthma.²

¹ Rhode Island Department of Health. (2024, December 5). *Asthma surveillance data*.
<https://health.ri.gov/data/asthma-data>

² Johnson SB, Spin P, Connolly F, Stein M, Cheng TL, Connor K. Asthma and Attendance in Urban Schools. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2019;16:190074. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.190074>



Rhode Island faces a serious childhood asthma crisis, ranking 25% higher than the national average for rates of childhood asthma.³ In our 2025 Asthma Capitals research report, **Providence ranked in the top 10 most challenging cities to live with asthma.**⁴ We base this metric on three health outcomes: prevalence, asthma-related ED visits, and asthma-related mortality rates. Nationwide, 9 to 11 people lose their lives to asthma every day. Taking action to minimize the risk factors that exacerbate this chronic condition can help prevent severe outcomes for students and their teachers.

Improving indoor air quality in our schools is an accessible step that can prevent severe outcomes for children suffering with asthma, improve school attendance, boost academic achievement, and support teacher health. States across the country have taken steps to improve indoor air quality in schools, including California, Nevada, Oregon, and Connecticut. In Rhode Island, implementing these air quality measures would simply build upon existing survey processes and identify issues related to ventilation, filtration, carbon dioxide levels, and airborne pollutants. Following in the footsteps of other states, S 2873 proactively addresses poor air quality before it increases long-term facility costs or long-term health issues for teachers and students.

When we spend nearly 90% of our time indoors, good air quality is a necessity for health. Students and teachers spend approximately 7 hours of their day in school, and it is essential that this time is spent in a healthy environment, especially for the two students per classroom in Rhode Island that have asthma.^{5,6} For the thousands of Rhode Island children who manage asthma every day — and for the teachers and staff who work in these buildings, this bill matters. We respectfully encourage the committee to move this bill to the Senate floor for a full vote.

Sincerely,

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

³ American Lung Association. (2025, June 26). *Current asthma by state, 2023*. <https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease/asthma-trends-brief/data-tables/asthma-current-state>

⁴ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, (2025). 2025 Asthma Capitals. Retrieved from asthmacapitals.org.

⁵ Rhode Island Department of Health. (2024, December 5). *Asthma surveillance data*. <https://health.ri.gov/data/asthma-data>

⁶ *National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2017–2018*. National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/ntps1718_ftable06_tls.asp.