Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

We are writing as a group of organizations and urge you to support and advance H.7582, 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 Rhode Island 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 H.7582, 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.

H.7582 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 H.7582 and help ensure its swift passage.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Kenneth Mendez

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, New England Chapter, Jan Hanson

Air Club, Skandan Ananthasekar

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, Cara Cook

American Lung Association, Dan Fitzgerald

ASHRAE, Bill McQuade

Conservation Law Foundation, Darrell Brown

Illinois Stakeholders for Air Quality in Schools, Tony Colaneri

Medical Students for a Sustainable Future (MS4SF), Aroub Yousuf

NADCA, The HVAC Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Association, Kim Wieland

National Education Association Rhode Island, Mary K. Barden

National Energy Management Institute, Joe Pickens

NERC SMART Local 17 Rhode Island, Patrick Donlon

Rhode Island Certified School Nurse Association

Rhode Island Sierra Club, David Veliz

RICOSH, James Celenza

SafeTraces, Erik Malstrom

SMART National, Jill Ashton

Individuals

Joseph Braun, Brown University

Natalie Harrington, Parent of PVD School Child

Leah Lovgren, Parent of PPS Children

Dr. Andrea Pappalardo Wlochowicz