Tamara
GRIGSBY

State Representative
18th Assembly District

Testimony Before the Assembly Committee on Education September 8, 2009 Assembly Bill 358

I wanted to thank Chairwoman Pope-Roberts for scheduling Assembly Bill 358 for a public hearing today. I would also like to thank the Chairwoman and committee members Hilgenberg and Hixson for cosponsoring this legislation.

Wisconsin's children are heading back to school as we speak. As the new school year begins, it is worth taking note of some important statistics related to the quality of health in our schools. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), indoor air pollutant levels are usually two to five times greater than outdoor levels. Combined with the fact that most people spend 90% of their time indoors, this hazard has led the EPA to name indoor air pollution among the top five environmental risks to public health. Given the level of concern, we must take the steps necessary to ensure a true standard of health for Wisconsin's students and those educating them.

This bill creates the Indoor Environmental Quality in Schools Task Force, which will lead the way in maintaining and improving indoor air quality in Wisconsin's schools. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will be directed to take the recommendations put forth by the task force and establish a plan that outlines the best practices for schools to provide a quality atmosphere for students and teachers. Each school will then use the model put forward by DPI to create a school-specific strategy for maintaining indoor environmental quality.

This indoor air quality legislation addresses growing concerns over air quality inside buildings that are not unwarranted. Poor air quality can lead to allergies and headaches, as well as respiratory problems such as asthma, an illness that afflicts nearly 1 in 13 children. Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness, which should stress to us all the importance of our schools' air quality. After all, how can we hope to guarantee a quality school education for students if we cannot guarantee quality air for them to breathe in their schools?

In addition, teachers and school districts will experience the benefits of a clean air environment. Additional benefits, ranging from a reduction in teacher sick days to reduced insurance and risk related costs, are certainly realizable through this legislation. Not only can this bill save Wisconsin taxpayer dollars, it will lead to greater returns on the investments we are making in our public infrastructure and our future.

More than 20 states have passed laws to address indoor environmental quality in schools, ranging from Texas to Rhode Island. Clearly, this issue is about the health and education of our children more than anything else. With that, this bill moves forward to establish quality air within our schools, something we can all appreciate.

I thank the committee for its time and consideration of this matter.

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Assembly Bill 358
Indoor Air Quality in our Public and Private Schools

By Jeanne Black

Sept. 8th, 2009

I would like to take a moment and thank all of you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Assembly Bill 358 Indoor Air Quality in our Public Schools.
My name is Jeanne Black and my daughter is Jade Black who is now a freshman at the University of Wisconsin Platteville. I am here speaking on behalf of all students in Wisconsin K-12 public and private schools.

We have experienced first hand problems with this life threatening health hazard in our public schools.
We experienced what many at this moment have experienced and still are experiencing with problems with indoor air quality from molds, chemicals, cleaning chemicals and simply not enough fresh air coming into our schools in this state.

As a result with physician orders we left our school we were so proud of in the past. We then entered a pro-active school 5 years ago and symptoms were gone. No more inhalers and 350.00 worth of medications a month. No allergic reactions so severe they become life threatning. No child in the state of WI should have to take inhalers and medications to get thru school and many, many children are. Not to mention with this disability children are denied an education and we are an example of being denied a public school of our choice.

Without regulations and laws in Wisconsin on this issue it gives school boards and administrations a chance to deny, cover up, threatning jobs and simply not address the issue, while our children are inhaling toxic air on a daily basis. There are countless laws out there that regulate safety in our schools but we must continue to address each new problem and mandate the safety of our schools at all costs. Breathing toxic air is proven to be a health hazard and cancer causing.

I have met with and worked with Administration of schools, Principals, Cleaning staffs, Hygenists, State Health, Local Health, Insurance Companies, Dept. of Commerce, Engineers, Physicians, Cancer Research Specialists, WI Senate and Assembly, U.S. Senate, President of the U.S., members of groups from New York, California and all of these agencies have stated with no laws and regulations we cant enforce only recommend. My family and I were very active in the first indoor air quality bill introduced in WI Senate Bill 325 in 2006.
Recommendations and guidelines are not enough, we need enforcement and Assembly Bill 358 is a good start.

Without laws and regulations children like my daughter are denied an education. What is protecting these children with environmental disabilities?
When we send our children out the door in the morning, we entrust their care to the administration of schools. Please make schools accountable, educate them on sick building syndrome, educate maintence staff to understand the hazards to themselves from chemical exposure, and make school boards liable for the safety of our children and let every student and employee breath clean air in every public school in Wisconsin.

It is every child's right in the state of Wisconsin to breathe clean air. They are our future. It is every child's right to breath clean air but it is also their U.S. Civil Right. According to the U.S. Department of Civil Rights it is responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990(Title II),42 U.S.C. Statue 12132, and its implementing regulation at 28 C.F,.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities.

To the current date my daughter has been declared with a disability. The medical diagnosis is "SEVERE MOLD INDUCED ASTHMA".
We are very fortunate to have excellent health insurance but what about the parents of many children who are not so fortunate. This has created a great hardship. Some families around the state have had to pick up their families and move so their children could attend school. This has created a huge financial burden.

I feel Assembly Bill 358 is a good start but I would like to see penalties included if these laws are not met either by a financial penalty or civil and criminal charges.
Without some type of penalties this law will not help this growing health concern.

There are over 28 states right now that have laws on this issue or have legislation started. Wisconsin needs to address this health hazard head on also.

1. Why can WI develop a task force for other issues in WI but not Air Quality for our children?
2. Why does WI inspect our hospitals and nursing homes on a regular basis but not our schools?
3. Recently WI was awarded 125.5 million dollars from the stimulus package to put towards our schools. These bonds will help money flow through the economy and help WI schools repair, improve, and build new facilities. Can you say no to a task force to make sure our facilities are healthy?

If you can not breathe you can not learn.
There is only one solution to this situation. We must remove the danger entirely. Laws must be implemented and enforced to protect our children.

A provision I would like to see added to Assembly Bill 358 is that if a child has physician orders to leave the environment due to an environmental disability that the school accommodate them to another public or private school. States around the U.S. are doing this at this time Wisconsin should also.

As a result my daughter's exposure and disability it effects where she lives, goes to school, and works for the rest of her life. She has been declared with a legal disability with substantial reactions to indoor environments according to the American Disabilities Act.
I support Assembly Bill 358 and it is a step in the right direction for our children to remain healthy.
Thank you
Jeanne Black
17880 Hirshbrunner Darlington, WI 53530

Re: Wisconsin State Assembly Committee on Education

Public Hearing on Assembly Bill 358 on IAQ in Schools

Dear Jeanne:

Thank you for asking for technical comments on WI Assembly Bill 358. While we are not a WI-based organization, we do work nationally to advance child and adult environmental health in schools, and through coordinating the national Coalition for Healthier Schools have learned much from the technical presentations on IAQ and much more from grassroots and state leaders in this important work.

We are also thrilled to have won several awards, including an EPA National Special Achievement Award for advancing IAQ in schools, a national Green Apple Award from the San Francisco-based Collaborative for High Performance Schools for advancing IAQ in school design, and a Children's Health Protection Award from EPA's Office for Children's Health for parent and personnel communications work. I am also honored to have led three briefings for The White House, to have led two US Senate hearings on the environmental conditions of schools, and to have fostered coalitions in a dozen states.

EPA has estimated that up to half of all schools nationwide have **avoidable** IAQ problems that daily and silently erode children's health, attendance, achievement, and behavior. In support, there has been an explosion of published peer-reviewed science in the field of healthy indoor environments— termed "robust sciences" by the esteemed National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council whose expert panel recommended (*Green Schools*, 2006) that "conventional green" schools should be deliberately design-in features to ensure they are dry, clean, quiet, control dust and particulates, provide good lighting and sanitation, and more. Nationally, schools are not dry, clean, quiet, etc, and additional studies have documented that <u>healthy school environments generate many times more benefits for schools than just conserving water or energy and recycling</u> (G Kats, 2006). Schools should be built and operated for children: the task force must never lose sight of this fact.

WI Assembly Bill 358 takes an important first step in creating an Education-appointed task force that is charged with recommending model management plans to address IAQ in schools, and requires that schools implement the plan.

In my own view, the work of the <u>task force would be immeasurably strengthened</u> by ensuring that the health (*in the bill*), environment, energy, and labor agencies are engaged. Each has its own role and potential for improving school environments (logging IAQ problems, trainings and interventions; chemical clean-outs, green cleaning,

siting, energy retrofits, etc., all related to healthy IEQ), while the Education Department and the LEAs have hefty platefuls of work with "The Race to the Top" and No Child Left Behind, not to mention budgeting in tough economic times. There is lots of work to go around; the fresh expertise and assistance of the other agencies could be highly beneficial. Health can play a special role.

This comes about because the key feature of un-healthy schools is that children— who breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults and who are more vulnerable to toxics than adults (Academy of Pediatrics, NIEHS, CDC, EPA), suffer first: absences, trips to the school nurse, escalating asthma episodes, and other health-based problems. It should be noted that children out number adults in K-12 schools by a wide margin (8:1 or so) and their education and development are the sole outputs of schools.

To that end, the task force would be strengthened by inviting several parents of health-affected children and children's environmental health experts to its membership, thereby representing the most vulnerable and most numerous of school occupants and users who might well speak to the need to providing training and outreach to schools, and providing tracking and preventive interventions for children at risk.

Thank you again for asking for comments, and by all means please stay in touch on this terrific issue. When the task force is established, please let me know so that, if and when appropriate, we can forward recommended reading and references.

Warm regards,

Claire Barnett

Claire L. Barnett, MBA, Executive Director
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www.nationalhealthyschoolsday.org

... for children, health, environment, schools, communities...since 1995

9-8-2009 Testimony to the Assembly Education Committee on "AB 358, Indoor Environmental Quality for public and private schools".

Good Morning, I am here to support Assembly Bill 358. I am a retired school district facilities manager and safety coordinator, with thirty years of experience. I write columns for the Wisconsin Association of School Board member's magazine "Wisconsin School News. Our school districts have been aware and concerned about Indoor Air quality since the 1980's. Fifty percent of our two thousand and forty eight plus multimillion dollar public school building inventory exceed fifty years of age. They are being replaced on a 600 to 1000 year turn over cycle. These older schools are the main source of our health and safety environmental issues. Mr. Bill Freeman is president of Environmental Management Consultants Inc., his firm is currently serving over 100 school districts in solving health and safety related issues. Mr. Freeman estimates many Wisconsin schools have spent more than $1 million in the past year (2005-06) to correct indoor air quality problems alone.

Typically, according to Mr. Freeman, IAQ problems are related to one or more of the following causes: Water incursion leading to moisture problems, Lack of maintenance of HVAC systems, Construction and remodeling practices, Faulty policies related to building use and cleaning, and inadequately trained personnel. Most of these problems can be minimized, or even prevented, if discovered early, yet very few school districts have a plan to address them. Most simply wait and react as more serious (and therefore more financially devastating) problems arise.

Assembly Bill 358, is very important, it should be of highest priority. I respect the idea of Department of Public Instruction to be the committee chair and to have the responsibility to implement the eventual statute, statewide. Senate Bill 41 and Assembly Bill 358 are weak on enforcement. Enforcement must be considered for the eventual statute to function as the legislature intended. Enforcement has the function of defining the legislative intent of the statute. I offer two examples: Asbestos was defined as being friable, and could be worked by hand pressure alone, later that was determined to be flawed when discovered transite asbestos window panels, and asbestos floor tile are very hard. Second, when a chemical spill sends students or employees to the hospital emergency room they must have a required material safety data sheet with them to help the physician provide appropriate treatment for the patent or patents. Originally these MSDS sheets where required in one location in each school, they are now required in every class room for each chemical used.

Next enforcement inspections require expenditure of school district funds to meet statute compliance, regardless of the school or school district budget status at the time. Enforcement requires the proactive approach, it involves enough, school district trained, qualified, and dedicated employees to avoid overwhelming economic burden from unscheduled compliance inspections, and it saves lives. In addition, it requires the same from the enforcement agency enough dedicated, qualified, and trained employees. It will be imperative for the DPI to determine, and recommend to the legislature the appropriate qualified enforcement agency. It would be prudent to require all state enforcement agencies to post all school inspections on a designated web site, to provide transparency of inspections being done and alert school districts of what is being required. This will help them to be proactive and accountable to avoid unexpected and expensive compliance cost. Enforcement agencies should be held accountable to inspect our Wisconsin Schools on a three year rotation schedule.

Last, I ask the legislature to consider the importance of this statute. Our new schools are being designed with more advanced and sophisticated mechanical systems, including electronic computer controls. Yet, we will not be able to keep up economically with the need to replace older obsolete schools, we need to upgrade, update or replace these old mechanical systems. Let me provide an example, our older obsolete schools with pneumatic temperature and air conditioning systems (if they have been added) have fresh air dampers which typically leak ten percent or more. Many of these dampers are worn out and most are out of sight, out of mind, and need replacement after forty or fifty years of around the clock 24-7 usage. Now consider the amount of hazardous materials, especially dangerous vapor pressurized bulk chemicals on our highways, railways, on Lake Michigan, and the Mississippi River. In the case of a major spill, with unfortunate weather conditions, we might get the schools climate control systems shut down if we are notified in time and are lucky, however it will not be adequate for our many schools with flawed fresh air dampers. This is just one example of potential multiple fatuities and we do not want to go there.

You're Indoor Environment Quality for Public and Private Schools bill is the correct strategy at the right time.

Assembly Bill 358
Indoor Air Quality in our Public and Private Schools

By Rita Ruiz
Sept. 8th, 2009

My name is Rita Ruiz, and this is my son Nick. We are in support of Assembly Bill 358 relating to indoor environmental quality in our public and private schools. We have experienced first hand what an environmental problem in a public school can do.

We had no choice but to transfer Nick to another district because of the numerous health issues he was experiencing caused by mold. Some of my son's symptoms included chronic strep throat, rashes, mouth ulcers, irritable bowel, headaches and respiratory distress. Since he has attended his new school, his symptoms disappeared while in attendance, however, because of his previous exposure to these deadly mycotoxins, he is now severely allergic to mold and is permanently disabled. Nick has been diagnosed with trichothecene mycotoxicosis which is, in layman's terms, mold poisoning. His pathology report clearly demonstrates systemic yeast infection and severe chronic poisoning to the extent of Late stage II, with Late stage III being death. There is significant evidence of tissue cell loss and inflammation of all major organs and systems. In most cases, dead tissue cells from these organs will not ever be regenerated or replaced. At this stage, without treatment, the prognosis is poor. My son will now have to be monitored closely for the development of cancer within all major organs and systems. We have health insurance, but the treatment is not covered and it is not cheap.

This has been a huge burden on our family. We own a home that's been on the market for a very long time in a school district that our child cannot attend and one that we will never let our other three children attend. We moved three times in four months in hopes of being able to live in the other school district, but because of finances, we had to move back. We are now a one income family due to the fact that I cannot work a full-time job because I have to drive my children to and from a different school district twice daily. My children's extra-curricular activities have been compromised because we live too far away and we cannot afford to be driving back and forth any more than absolutely necessary. To say the least, the last three years have been extremely difficult and stressful for us as parents and for all of our children.

We strongly support Assembly Bill 358 but also feel that schools need to accommodate those who have physician's orders and have been declared disabled. This can be a life threatening situation. Please support Assembly Bill 358 so no one else has to go through what my child and family has gone through.

Thank you.

Rita Ruiz

CRUE

Coulee Region United Educators

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Directors:
Gerald Roethel
Deborah K. Byers
Steven P. Glandt
Edith Gustafson

Testimony of Gerry Roethel
Coulee Region United Educators
Assembly Committee on Education
AB 358
September 8, 2009

My name is Gerry Roethel and I am completing my 27th year of employment with Coulee Region United Educators (CRUE). I am here today to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 358.

I have had numerous occasions to be involved with indoor air quality issues. Most of the situations have involved school districts that attempted to provide a safe environment for students to learn and a safe environment for school employees to work in. Unfortunately, sometimes things happen that change this goal in schools. Mold, improper heating and ventilation, insufficient air flow, improper cleaning supplies and/or methods, and insufficient outside air all contribute to poor indoor air quality. When problems occur, the districts that find the best solutions are those that include the most information from all of the stakeholders.

Many CRUE schools are fairly small rural schools that have limited staffs with everyone assigned multiple tasks. I believe that Assembly Bill 358 would assist schools in the development of a management plan to improve and then maintain good indoor air quality. It is a start. Do I believe it goes far enough to fix the deferred maintenance and outdated systems that exist in some of our schools? No, but it is a start.

Twenty states are ahead of us on indoor air quality legislation. We have always had a reputation of having great schools. Good indoor air quality is a central ingredient to great schools. I ask that the committee and ultimately the Assembly and Senate adopt Assembly Bill 358 as both a good beginning and as a guidepost for improved indoor air quality.

Testimony of Jackie Vandenberg
West Bend Education Association
Assembly Committee on Education
AB 358
September 8, 2009

Good morning. My name is Jackie Vandenberg and I have just begun my 20th year of teaching and my 10th year at Jackson Elementary School in West Bend. I am here today to urge your support for Assembly Bill 358.

During the Industrial Revolution workers faced unregulated and unhealthy working conditions and opposition to change. Today, one hundred years later, there are still those whose workplaces need better management of environmental conditions to ensure their health and safety. I am speaking of the schools in Wisconsin's 425 school districts. The 875,000 children in those schools and the teachers and staffs that serve those children are in need of legislation to protect their environment. Just as we want no child to be left behind with respect to an education, we must also ensure a child's health and safety while in pursuit of that education, as well as the health and safety of those who make it their life's work to nurture that child.

These are my personal experiences with environmental concerns in my workplace, my school. I teach in one of the two original rooms in my school, built in 1894. I began in this part of the building in 2000 and several years after returned to school in fall to find that during the summer a HAZMAT team had cleaned out bat guano from the attic above my room.

In 2004 I had contracted pneumonia, and at the end of 2006 I again became ill with respiratory symptoms. Fearing that pneumonia had returned, I sought an x-ray, and upon review of it, was asked how long I had smoked. This was shocking, as I have never smoked at all. I was subsequently referred to Froedtert Hospital in Milwaukee, where a pulmonologist ordered a CT scan of my lungs. The CT results in April, 2007 revealed that my right lung showed evidence of an "atypical" organism, and it was suggested that I undergo an invasive procedure to determine the exact course of treatment. After researching this extensive procedure, and understanding that there was only a 25 percent chance of determining a treatment that would be feasible for me, I opted instead to follow a rigorous alternative plan of health and wellness supplements and lifestyle changes for rest and rehabilitation during the summer of 2007.

In fall the principal of my school urged me to move to a room in a newer part of the building, and in February 2008 a follow-up CT showed a right lung that appeared clear. I remained in the newer room until last week. This year, because of high enrollments, my school has added another section of students. It was decided that I move back to the old part of the building, giving the newer room to the added class of students.

Can I definitively attribute my lung problem to the environment of the old room? That is the delicate question raised by many environmental issues such as this one. The doctors believe that given my medical history, the issues of bat guano, forty-year-old carpeting, mice, and old building materials in this old school room are the significant factors that contributed to my illness.

While I have been told that the air quality has been checked I have not seen proof of this, so I do not know when or under what variables such tests may have occurred. I am now extremely nervous about spending time in this old building, and would like to instead be able to focus on my passion, which is teaching my 500+ students. I fear that my environment will affect my health and the health of the students.

Other teachers in my building have also had environmental issues and related health concerns, including those of mold growth and sewage that backed up into classroom cupboards.

Assembly Bill 358 would provide schools with the tools to better manage indoor environmental quality issues and would require that all school districts have a policy in place regarding indoor environmental quality that would meet the needs of their students and staff.

Andrew Carnegie, a 19th Century industrialist who had first-hand knowledge of the plight of workers, once stated, "Good leaders are those who provide ladders for the aspiring to rise." It is my hope that with your leadership you will support this bill, providing a ladder for teachers and students to rise toward healthier school environments. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Jackie Vandenberg
7031 Barber Circle
West Bend, WI 53090

Great Schools benefit Everyone!

Wisconsin Council of Religious & Independent Schools

Position Paper: Indoor Environmental Quality in Schools; AB 358

The Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools (WCRIS) is supportive of the co-authors intent to increase air quality standards through the creation of a task force and the development of a model management tool for maintaining indoor air quality in Wisconsin schools.

The Council is particularly pleased with the inclusion of a non-public school representative on the task force.

We are concerned, however, that the recommendations of the task force could result in costly, new mandates which could put additional pressures on many of our schools' capital improvement budgets.

As you know, the current state of the economy is affecting all of us, including private school enrollments and the funds available to operate our schools. Schools fortunate enough to have trust funds designated for capital purposes experienced drastic reductions in those accounts over the last several years.

Although many of our schools have incorporated interest earnings from such trust accounts in their normal operating budgets in the past, the current economic conditions have forced many schools to transfer large amounts from the principal of these accounts to cover their most pressing capital needs. The necessity of such transfers will affect the stability of these accounts for years to come.

WCRIS, through our representative on the task force, will be asking the legislature to include non-public schools should funding be provided to meet these new air quality standards.

Every student deserves clean air, regardless of the school they choose to attend.

Thank you once again for including a non-public school representative on the task force. WCRIS looks forward to working with you on this important issue. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Matt Kussow, Executive Director, at 608-204-0795.

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Tony Evers, PhD, State Superintendent

Date: September 8, 2009

To: Members, Assembly Committee on Education

From: Jennifer Kammerud, Legislative Liaison JK

Subject: **2009 Assembly Bill 358**

The Department of Public Instruction supports 2009 Assembly Bill 358 as it takes a holistic approach to the issue of indoor environmental quality in schools. As such, it positively addresses important health and safety issues.

The bill directs the state superintendent to establish the Indoor Environmental Quality in Schools Task Force. The task force is to make recommendations for the development of a model management plan for maintaining indoor environmental quality. The department feels this task force is appropriately located at DPI and that the expertise contained in the task force, as outlined in the bill, will augment the expertise and experience of the department in this area. The department has staff that work on school facility issues and has conducted in the past a statewide survey of the condition and capacity of the state's schools. Moreover, as outlined below, the state superintendent has statutory authority in regards to school facilities [Wis. Stats. 115.33 (3)].

> (3) (a) If the state superintendent determines that a school is not in compliance, and the department of commerce, based on its inspection of the school, concurs in the determination, the state superintendent may order the school board to repair, improve, remodel or close the school by a stated date. An order issued under this paragraph constitutes a preliminary finding of noncompliance with the standard under s. 121.02 (1) (i).
>
> (b) 1. If the state superintendent determines that a school is not in compliance and is not worth repairing, and the department of commerce, based on its inspection of the school, concurs in the determination, the state superintendent may order the school board to develop a plan that describes how the school board will achieve compliance with the standard under s. 121.02 (1) (i). The plan shall specify the time within which compliance with the standard under s. 121.02 (1) (i) shall be achieved. The state superintendent shall hold a public hearing on the plan in the school district and may, as a result of the hearing, recommend changes to the plan. The state superintendent may withhold up to 25% of the school district's state aid if the school district fails to achieve compliance with the standard under s. 121.02 (1) (i) within the period specified in the plan.

This bill would help make schools safer by having standards for indoor air quality to help prevent long and short term health problems for students and staff and, as such, we urge your support for AB 358.

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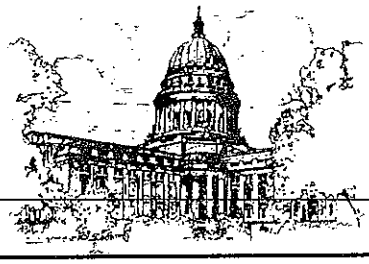
JIM SULLIVAN
STATE SENATOR



5TH SENATE DISTRICT

Wisconsin State Senate

Testimony of Senator Jim Sullivan regarding Assembly 358:
Indoor Air and Water Quality in Public and Private Schools
Assembly Committee on Education
September 8, 2009

Chairperson Pope-Roberts and members of the committee, thank you for holding a hearing on AB 358, the companion bill to SB 41, authored by myself and Representative Tamara Grigsby. This legislation will help give schools a protocol to follow when dealing with indoor environmental quality issues. I am very pleased to tell you that this legislation has support from the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School Business Administrators, and the Wisconsin Council for Administrators of Special Services, and the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC). I hope that it will have your support when it comes to a vote.

Our schools need the tools to address indoor environmental quality issues, and AB 358 gives them guidance and expertise to deal with such issues.

Good indoor air quality in schools contributes to a favorable learning environment for students and a productive work environment for staff. Failure to prevent and respond to indoor air problems promptly can have grave consequences for our teachers and students, including health problems, reduced performance, and absenteeism. In addition, poor indoor environments increase the potential that schools will have to be closed and occupants relocated, and it accelerates the deterioration of school buildings.

AB 358 requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to convene a task force to develop a model management plan for indoor environmental quality in public and private schools. Using the DPI plan as a model, school districts will be able to adopt a plan that best meets the needs of their community.

28 states already have laws regarding indoor air quality in schools, and it is imperative that we continue to help schools in Wisconsin solve their indoor air quality issues. Through an informal WEAC survey and records requests from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and the former Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, WEAC identified almost 100 school buildings with concerns about indoor environmental quality.

Today, you will hear from parents and school district employees from across the state on how indoor environmental quality affected their lives. I, along with them, ask for your support of this legislation. Again, thank you for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 358, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions.

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WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

Affiliated with the National Education Association

Great Schools benefit Everyone!

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education

From: Wisconsin Education Association Council

Date: September 8, 2009

Re: Support for Assembly Bill 358, relating to school indoor environmental quality

The Wisconsin Education Association Council supports Assembly Bill 358 to protect the health and safety of students and school staff. This legislation will provide school districts with expertise and guidance from a state task force of diverse members that will develop recommendations for a model management plan for maintaining indoor environmental quality in schools. In addition, Assembly Bill 358 will ensure that over time all school districts adopt and implement a locally-developed plan to maintain indoor environmental quality in their school buildings.

Maintaining environmental quality in schools facilitates student learning and promotes a productive work environment for staff. Schools throughout the state are struggling with air quality concerns such as mold, fungi, asbestos, carbon dioxide, and poor ventilation. Left unaddressed, such issues can lead to health problems, reduced student academic achievement and teacher performance, accelerated school building deterioration, school closings, and student and staff relocation – all major disruptions of the learning process.

Passage of this legislation will provide schools with the guidance and expertise to deal with indoor environmental quality issues and encourage them to take preventive measures. This saves taxpayer dollars in the long run. In addition, it will lead to better communication between school officials, educators, parents, students and community members about health and safety risks posed by indoor environmental quality issues. When dealing with an air quality crisis, honest and open communication is essential to dispel myths, allay fears, and provide an opportunity to involve the community in the problem-solving process.

Let's add Wisconsin to the list of more than 20 states that have passed laws to address indoor environmental quality in schools.

If you have any questions, contact Deb Sybell, WEAC Legislative Program Coordinator, at (608) 298-2327.

Mary Bell, President
Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director

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