



July 25, 2007

To the Joint Committee On Public Health
State Senator Susan C. Fargo
and State Representative Peter J. Koutoujian
Room 130, State House, Boston, MA 02133

Re: An Act Promoting Healthy Buildings and Public Schools (HB 3056).

I write as a parent, as a health advocate and on behalf of the Massachusetts PTA to support **HB 3056 An Act Relative To Healthy Schools And Public Buildings.**

For far too many students and teachers, school is a disabling environment that undermines their ability to teach and learn.

Preventative maintenance programs would protect our children's future as well as our investment in our communities. In this time of distress about health care costs and the crisis in health insurance, it makes no sense to have teachers and children going to schools that make them sick.

Please think of HB4766 as a health security plan.

You will find no better inspiration for the potential of HB 3056 than Westborough Massachusetts. It is both the worst and the best example of the problem and its solution. Westborough Schools went from being a horror story, featured on ABC's Good Morning America with the title "Girl's Illness Traced to Toxic School," to become an authentic living model of community improvement that everyone is proud of.

Thanks to the combined efforts of School Committee member Bruce Tretter and parent Kathy King, the Westborough Schools are now a success story that proves that good documentation, open communication, transparent decision making, high standards for health and safety, and parent involvement are the key to improvement.

Westborough has a successful system of self-inspection, documentation, and accountability for repairs and remediation. Everyone shares responsibility for monitoring conditions and contributing to maintenance and improvement. It avoids expensive problems and reduces risk of illness and school disruption. Everyone understands the benefits of fixing air quality problems before they become health problems.

THE PTA POSITION

For over a century, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has focused its advocacy on the health and education of children. The Massachusetts PTA supports legislation and funding to improve ventilation standards, building codes and preventative maintenance requirements. We support the new accountability and quality management system defined in HB 3056 because it has the potential to give

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our children schools that are safe, well-equipped, and well-maintained.

To my testimony I have attached a report by our own Massachusetts state agencies that summarizes the extensive and intractable environmental health and safety problems throughout the Commonwealth, "Environmental Health And Safety Problems Reported in Massachusetts" Public Schools, February 2006."

For every hazard and safety violation identified in its pages -- mold, hazardous chemicals, pesticides, and lack of ventilation and temperature control to name just a few -- there are thousands of students struggling to breathe, struggling to pay attention in spite of headaches and stomach aches, and other symptoms of poorly designed and poorly maintained schools.

It is time to give our public agencies the enforcement authority to make health and safety a priority and to correct these long standing hazardous conditions and safety violations. I support HB 3056 because I believe that parents, educators, health professionals and legislators owe it to children to eliminate environmental hazards that are a source of preventable illness and disability.

I urge your unanimous support.

Yours truly,

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