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Written Testimony of

Donald E. Williams, Jr., Executive Director

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Committee on Public Health

RE:

RAISED SENATE BILL NO. 288

AN ACT CONCERNING INDOOR AIR QUALITY IN SCHOOLS

FEBRUARY 8, 2021

Good afternoon, Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Don Williams, and I'm the executive director of the Connecticut Education Association.

Thank you for raising Senate Bill 288, An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality.

You have seen this legislation before—it was raised last year and had broad bipartisan support, before the pandemic brought the session to a halt.

Few things are as important to the health of students, teachers, and staff as the quality of the air they breathe.

I'm sure you're aware of news reports how schools have faced challenges—and even been forced to close—because of high temperatures, humidity, mold, and poor air quality.

The importance of this issue has never been more apparent than today, especially to help prevent the spread of disease such as COVID-19, childhood asthma, and respiratory problems.

The Indoor Air Quality bill provides standards for improving and maintaining safe heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems to prevent the transmission of viruses, mold, and other toxins.

This bill would require boards of education to implement an indoor air quality monitoring program by June 30, 2023. Regional Councils of Government could be used to help regionalize and oversee the program in an efficient way.

The bill should include clear standards for temperature and humidity, specifically that starting on July 1, 2024, temperatures be maintained between 65 and 78 degrees in schools. For perspective, this is the same standard that's required in our Department of Agriculture regulations for pet shops. Just to underscore that point, we provide clearer standards for pets in pet stores than we do for children in schools. We can do better.

My final and most important point in order to address this problem is that towns need resources. This legislation would allow towns to bring HVAC systems into the twenty-first century by accessing school bonding construction funds. It's a logical use for the funds. Connecticut needs schools that are safe and accessible to students and the community throughout the year. Improving schools to support and protect the health of students, teachers, and staff is a sensible use for school bonding funds.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this important legislation.