Testimony of

Kate Dias
Coalition for Healthy Air in Schools
President, Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Appropriations Committee

Re:
HB 5037 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2023
DAS Agency Budget

February 18, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kate Dias, President of the Connecticut Education Association. I am testifying on behalf of the **Coalition for Healthy Air in Schools**, which is comprised of parents, educators, labor unions, building trade workers, contractors, public employees, and healthcare workers. We stand together in support of Governor Lamont's proposal to invest $90 million to improve the air quality within our public school buildings.

When the coronavirus reached us in March of 2020, it became immediately apparent that our failure to invest in maintaining and improving the ventilation systems in our public buildings would have drastic consequences. Our desire to safely reopen our schools was significantly compromised by our inability to guarantee the necessary air filtration. While the problems in our schools understandably received the most attention, the issue was no less severe in many of our public buildings – hospitals, post offices, even the Capitol and Legislative Office Building. Our decades-long refusal to maintain and improve our HVAC systems and take concerns about indoor air quality seriously has had a significant impact on the health of our communities. Though the most recent variant of the coronavirus seems to be finally receding, the need to improve the indoor air quality in our public buildings, especially our schools, remains. We cannot ignore the lessons of the past two years.

We greatly appreciate Governor Lamont's allocation of $90 million dollars for indoor air quality. We believe that $90 million is only a first step, however. We believe that the amount of money required to truly address the problem is far greater. The bill for decades of neglect has come due, and we can no longer ignore the problem. For this reason, we strongly support all efforts to increase bonding funds so that cities and school districts can install, remediate, and maintain modern HVAC systems.

Improving indoor air quality requires more than just money, however. We need to establish clear protocols and provide oversight to ensure that the work is being performed by the most qualified licensed HVAC contractors and certified technicians. We need specific standards to establish what acceptable indoor air quality is. We need benchmarks to evaluate the performance of HVAC systems. Lastly, we need people to oversee and enforce indoor air quality standards.

The task ahead is daunting, but only because we have failed to address indoor air quality in the past. COVID has shown us that continued neglect is not an option. We thank Governor Lamont for recognizing this fact and dedicating $90 million to begin the process of improving the air quality within our school buildings. We urge you to support further investment so that the job can be completed.

Respectfully Yours,

Kate Dias, President
Connecticut Education Association

Jan Hochadel, President
American Federation of Teachers

Ed Hawthorne, President
CT AFL-CIO

Michael Thomas Mauro, Sr., President
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Kristen Abrahamson, Executive, Vice President
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