



Connecticut Education Association

Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street, Hartford, CT 06106
860-525-5641 | fax: 860-955-2508 | cea.org

Policy, Research, & Government Relations

Ray Rossomando, Director

Testimony of
Louis Rosado Burch
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Finance Committee

Re:
GOVERNOR'S BILL 1247: AA AUTHORIZING AND ADJUSTING BONDS OF THE STATE
February 26, 2025

Honorable committee chairs, vice chairs, ranking members and distinguished rank and file members of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important legislation.

The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) is the state's largest association of certified public-school teachers, representing over 40,000 active and retired teachers in more than 150 school districts across the state. CEA is dedicated to improving the lives of our teachers, the success of our students, and the overall quality of public education in our state.

CEA supports Governor's Bill 1247, which authorizes up to \$20 million in bonding for capital expenses for Regional Educational Service Centers (RESC) interdistrict magnet schools, and a total of \$11.5 million to the University of Connecticut (UConn) Health Center to support their Supplemental Air Filtration for Education (SAFE) program. These are critical programs with significant and diverse funding needs, and they should be approved and implemented without delay.

Capital Improvements

CEA supports the bond authorization of \$20 million for the RESCs, with up to \$10 million going to the Capitol Regional Education Council (CREC) in Hartford. Our schools have significant ongoing repair and maintenance needs. In 2023, CREC received \$10 million for capital improvement projects to repair roofs, sidewalks, and parking lots. This additional infusion of state bond funds is critical and necessary to address urgent facility needs in the near-term, including school HVAC upgrades needed to ensure healthy indoor air quality (IAQ) for students and teachers alike.

School IAQ

CEA has led the state in efforts to improve IAQ in Connecticut public school buildings, resulting in significant updates to the state's school IAQ law in each of the last three legislative sessions. These include the establishment of a school HVAC grant program under the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to reimburse boards of education for eligible costs related to school HVAC upgrades and replacement, updated school walkthrough inspections, and HVAC maintenance requirements. The legislation also requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish an indoor thermal comfort range of 65-80 degrees within public school facilities.

The aforementioned school HVAC grant program was an important step forward in promoting healthy school environments for all. For the first time ever, municipalities could apply for reimbursement for necessary HVAC repairs and upgrades they might otherwise not have been able to afford. According to DAS, more than 160 reimbursement grants were awarded to 60 school districts, for a total of \$178,172,387. After two rounds of grant funding, this program was unfortunately discontinued.

While the DAS grant program came as a tremendous and welcome investment at the time, there is still much work to be done to ensure healthy schools for all. Continued funding for school IAQ programs is necessary to continue the state's ongoing progress in improving air quality.

CEA appreciates the continued commitment of \$11.5M in grants to support the UConn SAFE program. This is an innovative approach to engaging with public school students in underserved communities around the issue of promoting healthy school environments. SAFE leverages cutting edge research, providing valuable STEM education to students while teaching them cost-effective approaches to improving IAQ, using easy to find household materials.

Through UConn's SAFE program, students receive materials and lesson plans to guide in the construction of Corsi-Rosenthal boxes (innovative DIY air purifiers constructed using a box fan, HEPA filters and duct tape). This is a safe, effective measure that can supplement good HVAC service while building skills and understanding among students. CEA was pleased to partner with UConn Health in 2024 to distribute materials for 100 Corsi boxes to 6 high-need school districts, including Bridgeport and Danbury, and we strongly support efforts to continue this work moving forward.

In closing, CEA supports and appreciates this committee's efforts to provide much-needed investment in school facilities, in accordance with the Governor's proposed budget. Properly maintained school HVACs, in particular, are necessary to ensure the health, well-being, and success of our students and teachers, and should be a long-term funding priority of the state. We thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue, and we look forward to working with this committee to promote healthy school environments for all.