

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1407

AN ACT TO DIRECT THE BOARD OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH TO DEVELOP INDOOR AIR QUALITY STANDARDS FOR BUILDINGS IN THE STATE IN WHICH PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS WORK

April 10, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Committee on Labor, I am Steven Bailey, the executive director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association neither for nor against L.D. 1407, An Act to Direct the Board of Occupational Safety and Health to Develop Indoor Air Quality Standards for Buildings in the State in Which Public Sector Workers Work.

Our members are in complete agreement on the goal of this bill. We want our children to be in safe schools with excellent air quality. For decades, Maine school districts have sought to use Maine's School Revolving Renovation Fund to help pay for indoor air quality improvements. Many districts left on the waiting list for this program have instead taken on the costs themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the critical importance of clean air and ventilation for protecting the health of every student and educator.

We thank the bill's sponsor for taking on this issue and working to improve air quality standards for public sector workers. However, our schools express some concerns regarding the downstream impacts of this bill and the substantial costs that could result.

Maine's schools are old and decaying. A recent report from the DOE to the Governor's Commission on School Construction shared that more than 400 Maine schools were built before the 1990s. Some were built in the 19th century, with needs ranging from roof leaks to mold removal. In recent years, multiple schools have been shuttered because of unsafe conditions.

According to one estimate currently under consideration by the Governor's Commission, to update or replace all school buildings built on or before the year 2000 could require in excess of \$11 billion in today's dollars. While we do not yet know what air quality standards would be developed under L.D. 1407, our members expressed concern that if their schools were required to meet new standards, the cost to upgrade facilities could be substantial – likely totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars or more, for some districts.

This does not mean that our legislators should not try to achieve these goals, as prioritizing the health of Maine students and educators is an important priority. However, we believe that funding must be included to help our local municipalities and school districts achieve any new standards.

The Governor's Commission on School Construction is specifically looking at this question within our schools at the moment: *What are the best ways of improving Maine's school infrastructure? What revenue sources can we tap into? What approaches are other states taking? What can our state accomplish on this issue, and what are we not able to accomplish at this moment because of fiscal challenges?* The Commission will be issuing its report later this month, and we believe it would be prudent for your committee to consider the infrastructure and financial needs of the state and our local school districts before passing any laws that could impact them.

Some previous legislative mandates, such as school lead testing, have not included funding for remediation. Meanwhile, this bill would consider a range of factors, from carbon monoxide to mold, radon, pesticides, insecticides and excess humidity – all of which may need to be addressed. Again, we believe that our state must prioritize student health, but any future enforcement must include funding to help our local districts and municipalities take on this challenge.