

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2006 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 1096

(Senator Garagiola)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Health and Government Operations

Task Force on Environmental Health Conditions in Maryland's Classrooms

This bill establishes a task force to conduct a study of environmental health conditions in all classrooms, including portable classrooms, throughout the State. The task force must submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by May 1, 2007. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) must provide staff for the task force.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2006 and terminates May 31, 2007.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for MDE and DHMH are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: The bill would not materially affect local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The study must identify potentially unhealthy environmental conditions and their extent within classrooms in the State; evaluate classroom design and construction specifications, ventilation systems, school maintenance practices, indoor air quality, and potentially toxic contamination including mold and other biological

contaminants; and identify and recommend best practices to prevent harmful environmental health conditions in classrooms.

Current Law: Governmental responsibility regarding indoor air quality has historically been allocated to MDE, DHMH, and the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation. Local health departments are also often involved. Monitoring indoor air quality in public elementary and secondary schools is the responsibility of the local school systems.

Background: According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), threats to children's health in indoor school environments range from problems with indoor air quality to problems caused by specific chemicals. Students are at greater risk because of the hours spent in school facilities and because children are especially susceptible to pollutants. In its February 2004 final report, the Task Force to Study Public School Facilities documented a need for \$150.2 million in school improvements to bring existing public elementary and secondary schools up to established indoor air quality standards.

According to EPA, the effects of poor indoor air quality in portable classrooms are no different than those in permanent classrooms. All school buildings use similar construction and furnishing materials, so the types of chemicals present in indoor air are not likely to be different for portable versus permanent classrooms. However, pressed-wood products, which may contain higher concentrations of formaldehyde, are used more in the factory-built portable units than in buildings constructed on-site. As result, levels of airborne chemicals may be higher in new portable classrooms, especially if ventilation is reduced. EPA advises that the most common problems with portable classrooms include:

- poorly functioning HVAC systems that provide minimal ventilation with outside air;
- poor acoustics from loud ventilation systems;
- chemical off-gassing from pressed wood and other high-emission materials, which may be of greater concern because of rapid occupancy after construction;
- water entry and mold growth; and
- site pollution from nearby parking lots or loading areas.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), as of November 2005 there were a total of 2,986 portable classrooms in use in the State.

MSDE advises that efforts are already underway at the local, State, and federal levels to address environmental health conditions in classrooms. According to MSDE, all Maryland public school systems have environmental safety coordinators on staff.

State Expenditures: MDE advises that, in order to conduct the study called for under the bill, the task force would likely need to hire a consultant. Legislative Services advises, however, that, with the expertise of the membership and the resources available from current efforts at the local, State, and federal levels, the task force could presumably conduct the study without hiring a consultant.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Although not identical, HB 350 of 2005 would have established a task force to study indoor air quality in educational institutions. The bill received an unfavorable report from the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of the Environment, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Maryland State Department of Education, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 25, 2006
ncs/ljm

Analysis by: Lesley G. Cook

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510