TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SAFE SCHOOLS INDOOR AIR ACT (HB686)
Submitted by the Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA)
to the Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 23, 2022

Mr. Chairman Barve and Respected Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Montgomery County Council of PTA's (MCCPTA). My name is Hannah Donart. I am the Chair of MCCPTA Health and Wellness Committee, a public health scientist, and mother of two young children attending a Montgomery County Public School. Our community urges you to support HB686 – Safe School Indoor Air Act. MCCPTA represents over 25,000 members from over 200 diverse school communities. This bill closely aligns with our advocacy priorities to improve ventilation and air filtration systems in every school in order to ensure a healthy environment for all students and staff, while providing equitable access to safe learning spaces for the most vulnerable.

MCCPTA supports this bill as it provides transparent, science-based measures that integrate indoor air quality (IAQ) control strategies that are fundamental to providing healthier school environments for all students, teachers, and staff. Children breathe more air per body weight than adults and have developing lungs. They also spend large portions of time in classrooms, many of which have been shown to have insufficient ventilation, or fresh air delivery.[1] Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) monitoring provides a measure of how much air is being exhaled and rebreathed in by others in indoor spaces—it's essentially a proxy for ventilation. Thus, the higher the ventilation rate, the more fresh air is being brought in lending to many short and long-term health and academic co-benefits.

Benefits of improving indoor air quality in schools encompass improved learning and overall health. Scientists have directly linked increased ventilation to higher test scores, reduced spread of infectious diseases including SARS-CoV-2[2], and minimized absences.[3] Increasing ventilation reduces indoor air pollutants that are triggers for chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma and lowers the risk of acute infection to many airborne illnesses. These health co-benefits contribute to lower absenteeism and increased learning opportunities. There is also strong evidence that the economic benefits from increased student performance and health far outweigh the costs of improving IAQ. A recent literature review looking at the net annual cost of improved ventilation, found that it ranges from just a few dollars to about ten dollars per person. This equates to "…less than 0.1% of typical public spending on elementary and secondary education in the United States."[4] Thus, this bill provides practical, data driven metrics that can aid school facilities in prioritizing funding allocation to promote healthy schools.

For all of these reasons, we support HB686. This immediate investment will have both short and long-term benefits to our children that far outweigh costs and prioritize their health and well-being. Every child has the right to a clean, healthy environment where they learn and spend a large portion of their time. For all the reasons cited above, we urge you to support HB686.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hannah Donart, MPH
The Montgomery County Council of PTAs

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[1] US EPA. Evidence from Scientific Literature about Improved Academic Performance. https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/evidence-scientific-literature-about-improved-academic-performance. Updated September 29, 2021.
[2] Zhang, J. (2020). Integrating IAQ control strategies to reduce the risk of asymptomatic SARS CoV-2 infections in classrooms and open plan offices, Science and Technology for the Built Environment. *Sci Technol Built Environ.* 26:(8),1013-1018, DOI: 10.1080/23744731.2020.1794499.
[3] US EPA. Evidence from Scientific Literature about Improved Academic Performance. https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/evidence-scientific-literature-about-improved-academic-performance. Updated September 29, 2021.
[4] Fisk, W. J., (2017). The ventilation problem in schools: literature review. *Indoor Air.* 27:(6), 1039-1051, DOI: 10.1111/ina.12403.