



Testimony in Support of House Bill 900  
Occupational Safety and Health - Public Buildings - Indoor Air Quality

Environment and Transportation Committee, March 9, 2023

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Mister Chair, Madame Vice Chair, members of the committee—thank you for the opportunity to speak on House Bill 900, which can help more than 75,000 educators and 900,000 students learn, thrive, and breathe in Maryland. My name is Eunice Salcedo and I am a Senior Health and Safety Specialist at the National Education Association, the nation’s largest union, representing more than three million teachers and school staff.

In my role at NEA, I have the privilege of working across the country to assess indoor air quality issues and advise school leaders on how to best protect their students and educators. I am here today to urge your committee to become champions for school health— and to cement Maryland as a foremost leader in protecting its students from airborne pollutants, pathogens, and disease.

To understand the depth of indoor air quality issues addressed by HB 900, it is vital to understand the breadth of the indoor air quality crisis we face across all of America’s schools. More than 14 million students and school staff are breathing polluted air every single day in our nation’s public schools.<sup>1</sup> Without any enforceable federal standards from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration on indoor air quality, school ventilation systems continue to deteriorate and toxic building materials remain in place, causing short- and long-term health effects while undermining students’ education.

Our students and educators deserve to feel safe and healthy. Whether it’s spiking asthma cases and respiratory illnesses or developing cancers and cardiovascular diseases, the adverse consequences of poor indoor air quality are real. These health risks are compounded even further in communities with more Black, Brown, rural, and economically disadvantaged students, due to even poorer resourcing and air quality systems.

This is a health issue with lifelong implications—but it isn’t just about health. A study of 100 U.S. schools found a direct association between student academic achievement and classroom ventilation rates, and that measurable progress in math and reading scores were observed when school indoor air quality was improved.<sup>2</sup> On the other side of the equation, more than 10.5 million school days are lost every year due to asthma, making it a leading cause

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<sup>1</sup> U.S Environmental Protection Agency. How big a problem is poor indoor air quality (IAQ) in schools? Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/how-big-problem-poor-indoor-air-quality-iaq-schools>

<sup>2</sup> Haverinen-Shaughnessy, U., Moschandreas, D. J., and Shaughnessy, R. J. (2011). “Association between substandard classroom ventilation rates and students' academic achievement.” *Indoor Air*. 21(2), 121–131. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0668.2010.00686.x>



of absenteeism in this country.<sup>3</sup> Our students cannot learn and our educators cannot teach when they're out sick.

According to medical science and studies on academic achievement the answer is clear, HB 900 is a bill worthy of passage and funding. I have seen firsthand how poor ventilation systems and the under-resourcing of infrastructure deeply impact students' health and ability to thrive academically. The passage of this bill would create a blueprint for states across America to end decades of under-funding air quality infrastructure with Maryland at the forefront of change.

The 3 million members of the NEA are behind this important legislation and applaud both the sponsors of this bill and the committee members here today for their willingness to invest in the students and educators of Maryland.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 900

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<sup>3</sup> Akinbami, L.J. (2006). "The state of childhood asthma, United States, 1980–2005." Advance data from vital and health statistics; Hyattsville, MD, National Center for Health Statistics: 381.