



**Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education  
Hearing on School Buildings and School Finance**

**H.469/S.242: An Act establishing a Green and Healthy Schools  
working group and implementation plan**

**Testimony**

I want to thank the Joint Committee on Education and staff, and in particular, Sen. Comerford and Rep. Domb, for their work to ensure that all children can learn and thrive in healthy schools in the Commonwealth. We applaud this legislation that will support much needed multi-agency collaborative planning for implementing and enforcing green and healthy school standards.

My name is Sarita Hudson and I'm Senior Director of Strategy & Development for the Public Health Institute of Western MA whose vision is that all people have what they need to lead healthy lives. For over 10 years, I've led the Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition as we work to address the conditions that cause and exacerbate asthma in our region. Over our history, the PV Asthma Coalition has worked with the Springfield, Holyoke, West Springfield and Northampton School Districts on improving air quality, implementing the EPA Tools for Schools model, and working to improve health of students, teachers and staff.

Clear standards, multi-agency collaboration and planning are necessary if we want to address the conditions of our public schools, which are overwhelmingly old and were never built to manage the current climate conditions that are linked to asthma and other respiratory issues. This planning is particularly needed for districts which are under-resourced and which have the greatest health inequities including Holyoke and Springfield and others in our region.

In the past few years, the metropolitan areas of Springfield, Worcester and Boston have been designated Asthma Capitals, with Springfield and Hampden County in the top spot for two years. Our children (and our teachers and school staff) deserve updated and healthy school buildings where they can breathe easily and learn better. The most recent data available show Holyoke (21%) , Springfield(17%), and Chicopee (17%) have some of the highest rates of asthma in the state, significantly higher than the statewide rate of 12% or more than double the national rate of 8%. Latino/Hispanic youth are most impacted with statistically significantly higher prevalence.

This high rate of asthma makes students vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Increased heat perhaps represents the greatest threat to public health brought on by climate change. Between 1991 and 2005, Springfield averaged 6.35 days over 90 degrees per year. By 2030, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health projects Springfield will have 18.13 over 90-degree days each year, a sharp increase. Within 20 years, which estimate rises to 29.18 days per year, almost a month of over 90 degree days. Just a couple of weeks ago, three districts in Western Massachusetts had to cancel classes due to the over 90 degree heat.



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Other climate impacts that school buildings face are heavy rain and flooding and potential mold issues; air quality concerns from ozone and wildfire smoke; and increased pollen as the season grows longer. All of these can cause asthma flareups, missed school days, missed work and community impacted by loss of learning.

We applaud this legislation that will bring together an interagency working group to develop a plan, standards and enforcement to address children's health, learning and our communities and Commonwealth's future and urge the committee to move H.469/S.242 forward out of the committee. Thank you.