



Legislative Testimony
765 Asylum Avenue, 2nd Floor
Hartford, CT 06105
860-523-9146
www.acluct.org

**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 1198, An Act Implementing the
Recommendations of the School Indoor Air Quality Working Group**

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty,
and members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of Senate Bill 1198, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the School Indoor Air Quality Working Group.

The ACLU-CT believes that all children deserve access to education in buildings where children can thrive and have their basic health needs met with potable drinking water, functioning air conditioning, and proper ventilation. Because of systemic racism and systemic inequity, the students who do not have access to these basic necessities are most often kids from low-income families and kids of color.

Environmental racism has a long history in this state and country. Robert Bullard, a giant in the field of environmental justice, wrote “[h]istorically, toxic dumping and the location of locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) have followed the ‘path of least resistance,’ meaning [B]lack and poor communities have been disproportionately burdened.”¹ Factors like proximity to highways, industrial businesses, and other sources of pollution and hazardous waste, have direct and scientifically-proven harms to public health.² Centuries of exclusionary zoning and racist covenants prevented

¹ Danyelle Solomon & Tracey Ross, *Protecting America from Racism in the Water*, CTR. AM. PROGRESS (Feb. 3, 2016), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-america-from-racism-in-the-water/>.

² *Id.*

people of color from accessing housing in communities further away from these externalities.³ The effects of exclusionary zoning are still felt today. Racial inequities are baked into the water we drink and the air that we breathe. Data from a 2016-2019 Environmental Protection Agency review of the public water systems that consistently violate the Safe Drinking Water Act are 40 percent more likely to serve people of color.⁴ Noncompliant systems also take longer to return to compliance when they are among communities of color. A study of ambient fine particulate air pollution, the largest environmental cause of human death, found that people of color are disproportionately exposed to more pollution at every source.⁵ These disparities persist despite evidence of an overall decline in particulate pollution.⁶ Scientific studies since the 1980s have found that communities of color are more often impacted by pollution than white communities.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted existing issues in the ventilation systems of Connecticut schools. One report by the Government Accountability Office estimates that nationwide 36,000 schools need to update or replace their heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC systems).⁸ This same report demonstrated that the schools in the most dire state are unequally distributed in school districts that educate the highest numbers of low-income students which, because of systemic racism, are often located in communities of color.⁹ These glaring inequities and safety issues are long-documented. In 2017, the American Society of Civil Engineers gave American school infrastructure a D+.¹⁰ In 2014, the National Center for Education

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Communities of Color More Likely to Suffer Drinking Water Violations For Years*, NAT'L RESOURCE DEFENSE COUNCIL (Sept. 14, 2019), <https://www.nrdc.org/media/2019/190924>.

⁵ Christopher W. Tessum, *PM_{2.5} Polluters Disproportionately and Systemically Affect People of Color in the United States*, 7 SCI. ADVANCES (2021), <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abf4491>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/28/climate/air-pollution-minorities.html>

⁷ Robert D. Bullard, *Solid Waste Sites and the Black Houston Community*, 53 SOC. INQUIRY 273 (1983), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1983.tb00037.x>.

⁸ *K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement*, U.S. GOV. ACCOUNTABILITY OFF. (June 2020), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/707374.pdf>

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Report Card for America's Infrastructure*, AM. SOC. CIV. ENGINEERS (2017), <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/cat-item/schools-infrastructure/>.

Statistics found that 53 percent of public schools needed to make repairs for their buildings to be in “good condition.”¹¹

There is substantial evidence that unsafe and uncomfortable learning environments adversely impact our kids. Virtually all studies on air quality in schools have found larger negative consequences of externalities among communities of color.¹² One study of asthma among children found that the death rate among Black children was seven times higher than white children.¹³ Poor air quality inside schools, on school property, and in the immediate area of schools are connected to lower student attendance and test scores.¹⁴ These are outcomes that will have consequences that can impact kids for the rest of their lives.

Poor environmental conditions due to environmental racism is linked to poor health outcomes. We as a state must take action to ensure that no child is subjected to poor air quality at school, at home, or anywhere. Senate Bill 1198 is a good step towards this goal. As such, we support Senate Bill 1198, and urge this Committee to the same.

¹¹ Debbie Alexander, et al., *Condition of America's Public School Facilities: 2012-2013*, NAT. CTR. ED. STAT. (2014), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014022.pdf>.

¹² Alejandro Vazquez-Martinez, Michael Hansen & Diana Quintero, *Unsafe School Facilities Reinforce Educational Inequities Among Marginalized Students*, BROOKINGS INST. (Sept. 1, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/09/01/unsafe-school-facilities-reinforce-educational-inequities-among-marginalized-students/>.

¹³ *Asthma and African Americans*, U.S. DEPT. HEALTH & HUM. SERV. OFF. MINORITY HEALTH (accessed Mar. 10, 2023), <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=15>.

¹⁴ Vazquez-Martinez, *supra* note 12.