

BILL: House Bill 900
TITLE: Occupational Safety and Health - Public Buildings - Indoor Air Quality
DATE: March 9, 2023
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) believes that indoor air quality standards for public schools already adequately ensure high levels of public health and safety within Maryland's public schools. However, MABE urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 900 because each local school system very recently completed extensive inspections of their buildings and this bill would therefore impose an unnecessary and duplicative burden on school facilities maintenance staff with little, in any, benefit to school facility conditions.

MABE agrees that ensuring indoor air quality in the public school setting is an important component of a school system's strategy to maintain healthy school environments. MABE has promoted the use of the U.S. EPA's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools guidelines and kit. MABE recognizes the value of these tools in helping to ensure good indoor air quality, and reduce the risks of student and employee health problems. In light of the existing breadth and depth of school facilities maintenance staff activities relating to using best practices, MABE does not believe the proposal to require school systems to participate in the extensive standard setting, inspection, and compliance system proposed by House Bill 900 is necessary to ensure high quality indoor air quality in schools or a prudent, cost-effective use of limited resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in revisions to public health and safety standards for all commercial buildings, including revised guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for school facilities. These standards have resulted in a wide array of previously unbudgeted investments in building systems, equipment, supplies, and school maintenance and custodial personnel. Fortunately, significant federal funding was provided to local school systems to support COVID-19 responses to ensure the safe operation of school facilities, including: purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies to sanitize school facilities; and inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, and installation of new systems to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities, including heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, filtering, purification and other air cleaning, fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement. However, in order to sustain the benefits of these one-time COVID-related expenditures local school systems are in need of increased investments by the State and local governments for school facilities maintenance personnel and maintenance budgets.

Local school systems are continuously devoting staff time and resources to efforts to provide healthy school environments, including addressing indoor air quality issues. Risk managers and facility maintenance staff recognize the need for a comprehensive preventative strategy, including educating and training staff, and providing them with the maintenance budgets to support these strategies. For example, routine cleaning and/or replacement of filters for HVAC systems is a simple yet essential component of a successful IAQ program. In addition, routine monitoring coupled with prompt responses to problems when they do occur can avoid the emergence of more serious and costly problems. These are examples of best practices that must be vigorously and continually implemented to ensure that indoor air quality does not become a negative factor for our students and teachers.

Again, MABE agrees that indoor air quality in public schools is a very important health issue, and greatly appreciates the intent of this legislation to improve conditions in all public buildings across the State. However, MABE urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 900 for the reasons outlined above.