



Testimony of the Department of Administrative Services

Education Committee

March 6, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. On behalf of DAS, we submit testimony in support of our agency proposal, [S.B. 288](#): *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Administrative Services Regarding the School Building Projects Statutes*. Additionally, we are providing general comments on the following bills before the Education Committee today: [S.B. 287](#): *An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools*, [H.B. 5346](#): *An Act Concerning Early Child Care*, and [H.B. 5347](#): *An Act Concerning Authorization of State Grant Commitments for School Building Projects and Revisions to the School Building Projects Statutes*.

Senate Bill 288: An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Administrative Services Regarding the School Building Projects Statutes

This proposal updates various sections within Chapter 173 (Public School Building Projects) to (1) clarify implementation of the increase in reimbursement rate for inclusive municipalities, (2) reflect the current administration of the grant program by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), and (3) repeal outdated sections and delete redundant language.

Last year, Public Act 23-207 created a new 5% rate bump in the reimbursement rate for school construction project grants for those projects located in “inclusive municipalities.” In order to be deemed an “inclusive municipality” by the Department of Housing, districts must meet certain delineated statutory requirements related to affordable housing.

This proposal clarifies the process a district must initiate with the Department of Housing in order to receive such an increased rate and adds relevant timeframes for such applications. Specifically, it clarifies:

1. That the increased reimbursement rate only applies to priority list projects;
2. That the Housing Commissioner provides the determination of which districts are deemed “inclusive municipalities;”

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3. That the district must initiate the request for the increased rate by submitting the Housing Commissioner's determination to DAS;
4. That for purposes of a regional BOE, the increase would apply only if the municipality in which the school building project is located is an inclusive municipality; and
5. That the written determination that a district is an inclusive municipality must be dated in the same year that the application is made.

These technical clarifications will ensure that the inclusive municipality rate increase is administered in a more equitable and efficient manner.

In addition, this proposal replaces references to the Commissioner of Education with the Commissioner of Administrative Services. The references to the Commissioner of Education remain in statute from a time when the school construction grant program was administered by the State Board of Education.

Finally, this proposal repeals the following outdated statutory sections that are no longer in effect:

- § 10-285f, which includes a pilot program through State Board of Education regarding design-build projects that is no longer active;
- § 10-285h, which includes a pilot program for charter school projects from FY 2006;
- § 10-287a, which includes lump sum payments for projects submitted prior to October 15, 1975;
- § 10-287f, which includes a renewal of notes under § 10-287a for projects prior to 1975;
- § 10-287j, which includes authority to issue bonds before July 1, 1999; and
- § 10-290d, which allows municipalities to convey air space over public schools with the Commissioner's approval; DAS is not aware of a need for this provision.

We urge support for SB 288, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Administrative Services Regarding the School Building Projects Statutes

Senate Bill 287: An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools

S.B. 287 is the result of the recommendations of the School Indoor Air Quality Working Group, which our Department of Administrative Services team was pleased to participate in. DAS is supportive of Section 1, which extends the working group by one year. The Department encourages further collaboration with the legislature, state agencies, and stakeholders to ensure a safe environment for students and school personnel across Connecticut.

Section 2 of the bill, updates the time period and reporting cadence for school districts to comply with the required evaluation and inspection of their heating, ventilation, and air

condition systems. Section 3 allows DAS to fund the cost of the evaluation and inspection from the HVAC Indoor Air Quality Grant Program.

DAS has heard concerns from districts about challenges they are facing in funding and completing the mandated 5-year evaluations and supports efforts to address those concerns to alleviate the burden on districts. DAS has concerns about the implementation of Sections 2 and 3 and will continue working with the proponents of the bill and other relevant stakeholders to refine this language going forward.

House Bill 5346: An Act Concerning Early Child Care

Section 4 of this bill requires DAS to conduct a study of state-owned buildings and property for the purpose of utilizing or converting such buildings and property for early childhood care. While DAS appreciates the intent of this legislation, we note that DAS only owns and oversees about ten percent of statewide property. Our Statewide Leasing and Property Transfer team is constantly evaluating the use of our spaces, and we are pleased to work with the chairs of this committee on this aspect of the bill moving forward.

House Bill 5347: An Act Concerning Authorization of State Grant Commitments for School Building Projects and Revisions to the School Building Project Statutes

House Bill 5347 contains the annual school construction Priority List and makes a number of revisions to the school building project statutes. DAS is generally supportive of updating and refining these statutes on an ongoing basis. We look forward to working with the proponents of the bill, and offer the following comments for informational purposes:

- Section 1 contains a drafting error – the “Fred D. Walsh” Museum School should be the “Fred D. Wish” Museum School.
- Section 2 requires DAS to review applications with education requirements “in consultation with the Commissioner of Education”. The Commissioner of Education approves the educational requirements before the applications come to us.
- Sections 2 and 4 eliminate references to Priority List categories. DAS is supportive of this change.
- Section 5 gives the DAS Commissioner authority to disapprove of school building applications if they do not include an attestation from the State Fire Marshal or the Commissioner of Public Health that the school project plans comply with certain requirements. Please note that the Local Fire Marshal is the authority that has jurisdiction over the State Fire Marshal requirements, and the Local Fire Marshal already signs off on building permits.

On behalf of DAS, I thank you for raising **SB 288** and appreciate your consideration of the points raised above on the various bills on the public hearing agenda.