



Comments on Assembly Bill 434 and Senate Bill 444 (Relating to: indoor air quality inspection and evaluation program for public schools.)

Both the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards (WALHDAB) and the Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA) agree that the air quality of our state's schools is of utmost importance and appreciate Representative Sortwell and Senator Cowles addressing this issue.

In AB434, local health departments (LHDs) would have significant involvement with school air quality inspections. In testimony submitted for the October 26, 2023, Assembly Education Committee hearing on this bill, the state Department of Health Services (DHS) estimated that they would need seven full-time employees and nearly \$664,000 annually in order to implement a school air quality program. Furthermore, they estimate that there would be one-time and recurring costs for equipment, as well as annual travel expenses. During this hearing, it was indicated that the responsibility for air quality inspections could be shifted to LHDs throughout the state. LHDs do not receive funding for this type of work and, in fact, most of the funding for LHDs comes from the local tax levy and not the state. According to senior LHD officials, most LHDs do not have any staff capacity or expertise in this area. In fact, at this time, many LHDs would need to rely upon DHS environmental health staff to do this type of work.

Finally, WALHDAB and WPHA have strong concerns about the provision in AB434 to remove existing public health authority under chapter 252 of state statutes – with respect to a “complaint, inspection, or evaluation” related to school air quality – from both DHS and LHDs. The ability of a local health department to have the authority to protect the public in situations in which the health of a community – including those who attend and work in schools – could be impacted due to dangerous levels of air contaminants is extremely important. Identifying dangerous levels of air contaminants is the goal of the bill; however, prohibiting an LHD from ensuring compliance by prohibiting utilization of chapter 252 of state statutes would potentially impact the health of students, school faculty/staff, and the general public.