



DISTRICT OFFICES
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March 17, 2023

Chair Conlon and Members of the House Committee on Education,

Thank you for inviting me here to address this critical issue. My name is Tom Flanagan and I am the Superintendent of Burlington School District. We are the largest single-town school district in Vermont. Last school year, we served more than 3,600 students PreK to 12, across 12 centralized campuses and additional locations for BTC classes, which I will talk about in a minute.

In 2018, Burlington voters approved a \$70m renovation project for Burlington High School. While preparing to execute this project, routine testing revealed that the levels of PCBs in the air at BHS and Burlington Technical Center, which share a campus, were above both the former and current action levels of PCBs. The levels were so high, State agencies strongly recommended closing the facility immediately. We looked for a location for the schools and ended up turning an old Macy's into a high school, with the help of the administration. It's clean, bright, and big, but it's a temporary building without a number of things a true school needs, such as an auditorium and a gymnasium, a working kitchen, and more. It's suitable as a temporary option, but not for the long term.

What often gets overlooked in this is the fact that the old Macy's wasn't big enough to fit BTC students or programs. Instead, we signed leases all over Burlington and South Burlington to host programs. Even today, our BTC classes are hosted in five different locations, costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in rent alone each year.

At the same time we were securing these temporary locations, we were looking closely at our renovation project. It quickly became clear that there was no fiscally responsible way to move forward with our plan. We found PCBs in the walls, the ceilings, the glue in our floor tiles, the caulking around the windows, in the soils, and in the concrete floor. In short, the building was totaled. In order to remediate our building, environmental regulations would have required us to remove EVERY source of PCBs. This would have required gutting the entire building at an incredible cost to taxpayers. In some cases, this would have meant removing entire walls of the buildings. And then, even if we were able to remove all contaminants, the PCBs themselves had leached so far that consultants said we would never be able to prove our building is PCB-free. In the end, we would have been left with a shell of a building that would need to undergo costly PCB testing in perpetuity, and one that would then still need to be renovated.

As you can imagine, the only solution for us was to abandon the renovation project and begin planning for a new building. After our School Board voted to implement the least expensive plan, Burlington Taxpayers were asked to approve a bond for \$165 million for the project. Voters approved the bond not because it's something our taxpayers can afford, but because there are no other options. A school is not



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a luxury, it's a necessity. Through that process, we, along with the Burlington House Delegation, assured our voters that we would seek meaningful support from the state to bring down the amount borrowed.

The cost estimate for the entire project is nearly \$190 million, including roughly \$17 million directly tied to environmental cleanup. We are asking for funding for full environmental costs plus \$3 million. That is a small percentage of the \$190 million project, a project which is only necessary because of the discovery of PCBs.

I know that I will not be the only one to sit here and share this deep need. As you know well, PCBs in Vermont's aging school infrastructure is not a problem that will go away anytime soon, and there will be districts across the state that will need your assistance. I don't envy the position that you are in, but I appreciate your willingness to hear about our struggle and I am grateful for your consideration of assistance.