Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office

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FISCAL NOTE

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S.279 An act relating to radon testing in schools – As Introduced

https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/S-0279/S-0279%20As%20Introduced.pdf

Bill Summary

The bill would require school boards statewide to adopt and implement school radon testing plans whereby schools would periodically test for radon, and if radon is detected, address the presence of the substance. All initial radon testing would need to be completed no later than January 1, 2021 unless a school had been tested on or after January 1, 2017. The radon testing results would have to be made available for public dissemination. The Department of Health would be required create a model radon testing plan for use by school boards and provide educational materials related to elevated concentrations of radon in school facilities. The bill would go into effect on July 1, 2018.

Fiscal Impacts

1. Radon Testing

   There are currently approximately 323 public school buildings and a further 124 private schools in Vermont[1]. The Department of Health (Department) currently provides free radon testing kits to schools in Vermont, in addition to providing kits for homeowners, utilizing grant funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Approximately ten schools are currently tested annually by the Department with variances based on the size of schools and whether follow-on action is required after testing. The Department estimates that fewer than 20 schools have been tested since January 1, 2017. Given the numbers above, the total number of schools that would need radon testing prior to 2021 is approximately 430. The Department believes that it could provide testing for an additional 5-10 schools per year if required. Assuming that the Department could test 60 schools over three years at no additional cost to the state or to taxpayers, the remaining 370 schools would need to seek outside professional assistance. The Department estimates that the cost to test a school, on average, would be $1,450. This cost would vary by the size of the school. The cost would be borne by individual school budgets, and therefore by the state Education Fund. If the costs were spread evenly over the next three state fiscal years then the annual testing costs could be as follows:

   FY2019 Cost: $215k Education Fund
   FY2020 Cost: $215k Education Fund
   FY2021 Cost: $110k Education Fund

[1] These numbers come from the Agency of Education. For public schools, the number of school principals is used as a proxy for number of school buildings. http://education.vermont.gov/documents/directory-principals-by-school
The Agency provides a directory of independent schools in Vermont and this number is also used as a proxy for the number of private school buildings. http://education.vermont.gov/documents/independent-schools-directory

2. Radon Remediation

   An estimate for the costs of remediation statewide is much harder to ascertain with any level of clarity. Remediation for elevated levels of radon would typically include drilling a hole in the foundation and installing ventilation to direct the radon away from the building rather than through the floors. The amount of drilling and ventilation required would be dependent on the number of rooms with elevated radon levels and how disbursed those rooms are within the building. The Department of Health believes that, based on prior testing results, there may be 35-45 schools in Vermont with elevated levels of radon. The average cost of remediation per school, based on a Department estimate, could be $1,700. Based on the variables listed above, there could be considerable variance in this cost estimate. If actual remediation costs held true to the estimates then there could be **$60-$80k in remediation costs** to be borne by the state Education Fund in future years. The bill language does not require that schools remediate within a specific timeframe, only that there needs to be a plan in place for addressing elevated concentrations of radon. However, given that testing results would be required to be made public, there would be considerable pressure from the public to remediate as quickly as possible. Total remediation costs would probably be incurred over the next three to four years as testing takes place.

3. Radon Planning and Education

   The Department of Health believes that if its responsibilities under the bill would be to create the model radon testing plan and to provide educational information on radon to school boards then it could do so with its existing staff and resources. However, if the intent would be for the Department to be charged with monitoring, ensuring and reporting on radon testing and remediation compliance, then additional resources would be required.