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COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION

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March 15, 2023

Hon. Bernard Sanders  
United States Senate  
332 Dirksen Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Peter Welch  
United States Senate  
G-12 Dirksen Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Becca Balint  
House of Representatives  
United States Congress  
1408 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Sanders and Welch and Representative Balint:

The members of the Vermont House and Senate Committees on Education (Committees) write to you regarding an urgent need in Vermont—funding for school construction projects. As you are aware, in 2007, the Vermont General Assembly suspended the State's school construction aid program in response to receiving demands that significantly exceeded available capital funds. The suspension was put into place to enable the State to begin to repay its obligations. At the time of the suspension, the forecasted amount of total State obligations for school construction was \$153 million.

The State repaid its school construction obligations in 2016, but the State aid for school construction program has not been reinstated. In 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an estimated \$445 million in bonding planned and proposed by school districts for future school construction projects statewide. Due to aging infrastructure, the necessity for

environmental remediation in school buildings, and the lack of modern technology and facilities, the estimated need has significantly grown since then.

Without a dedicated source of funding, the State faces an immense backlog in school construction projects, which has resulted in unsafe and unhealthy learning environments and disparities in the quality of education. The Committees have heard testimony about dire construction needs in schools, resulting in both temporary and permanent closures of school buildings. Schools have reported a range of serious issues, including sewage systems in disrepair, poor indoor air quality, and the discovery of toxic substances impacting the health and welfare of students and staff. As a result, funding for school construction remains an urgent priority for the Committees.

In 2021, the Vermont General Assembly passed Act 72, which takes several key steps to address the needs and conditions of school facilities in the State. The State's Agency of Education (Agency) is currently undertaking a statewide assessment of the needs of all school buildings, which will include an estimate of costs. The Agency is also preparing a school construction funding report based on the needs and estimated costs identified in this assessment. The Committees anticipate receiving the final assessment and funding report in October 2023.

The Vermont General Assembly is taking action to address the urgent school construction needs in the State. The Committees urge you to support measures before Congress that will assist the State in providing funding for school construction so that we can ensure that all Vermont children and our State's education workforce are in safe, healthy, and sustainable buildings.

Thank you for your attention to the Committees' concerns and for all that you do for Vermont. Please contact us if we can gather any additional information that you require. The Committees looks forward to working with you on this and other important issues in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Members, Vermont Senate and House Committees on Education

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Sen. Martine Larocque Gulick, Vice Chair  
Sen. Terry Williams, Clerk  
Sen. Nader Hashim  
Sen. David Weeks  
Rep. Peter Conlon, Chair  
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