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73 Highland Avenue, White River Junction VT 05001  
Catherine van Eyck-Sutton, Superintendent

802-295-8600

January 16, 2026

To: Members of the VT House Education Committee

From: Caty Sutton, Hartford School District Superintendent

RE: Testimony on H.542

Dear Members of the VT House Education Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony in relation to H.542 as introduced by Representative Conlon. My understanding is that you are hoping to better understand the status of PCB testing and remediation in the Hartford School District, a breakdown of what the state is paying for and what the district is currently funding, and what we have been told by the state to date in relation to what we can expect to be funded in the future.

With regard to the current status of PCB testing, abatement, and remediation in the Hartford School District, we have just completed our most recent quarterly air sampling and are awaiting the lab results. To provide a little context, since we were first tested and identified for PCB contamination three years ago, we have had to relocate three programs at the Hartford Area Career and Technical Center, one of which, our Culinary Arts Program, remains off-campus, and the other two programs are still within HACTC but in repurposed learning spaces. Over this past summer and as we entered into this current school year, quarterly air sample results necessitated that we take several classrooms offline as learning spaces at the start of the year at Hartford High School, impacting the learning environment of our educators and students. While another round of testing allowed us to access these spaces again, I am sure that I do not need to provide too much emphasis in highlighting how incredibly disruptive this is to the learning environment of our schools and our educators and students, who have spent countless hours relocating equipment and resources and attempting to recreate the learning environments that they have relied upon as proven and reliable spaces that are conducive to the learning our students deserve, nor how seemingly arbitrary and confusing it has been for our community to experience a situation in which they may occupy a space for one month, and have to relocate to another space the following month and are told that it is now safe and they should trust the information that was used to make these determinations.

It is also worth emphasizing that the relocation of programs and the closing of learning spaces at the HACTC continues to have significant impact beyond just the three programs whose spaces were closed. For years, the HACTC has been planning to expand our Building Trades program and was on the brink of making this change when the PCB testing results necessitated the closure of these learning spaces. The HACTC consistently has a lengthy waitlist of students who want to get into this trade and we have huge demand from area employers. Repurposing our spaces meant that we had to stop our plans to expand the growth of the Building Trades program. Right now we can serve a total of 32 students each year; if we had been able to expand, that number would be 64.

Additionally, we can not overstate the negative impact of relocating our Culinary Arts program offsite. Students at the HACTC only have a little more than 10 hours a week in their program. With the time it takes students to get bussed to our offsite location, they are losing over an hour of learning time every single week. Additionally, there was an immense amount of stress and strain that was put on staff members as we set up an entire commercial kitchen in the span of a few weeks.

Furthermore, the HACTC has been working to expand career training opportunities for adults in the area. The HACTC has created trainings for people to become electricians, licensed nurse assistants, wastewater operators and more. The closing of three classrooms and repurposing of spaces has meant that our multipurpose spaces are limited, and this has slowed the growth of these necessary programs and their impact on the overall growth of our community.

We are not sure when we will be able to bring these spaces back online, and we have now found ourselves in a seemingly perpetual cycle of testing. In addition to the quarterly air sampling that we have conducted as instructed by the state, we have also engaged in material sampling that has been recorded and documented and that indicates that there are several source materials that will need to be removed from both Hartford High School and HACTC if we want to fully eliminate the contaminating materials. In order to move toward the crucial next steps of obtaining cost estimates for remediation and abatement, the state has directed us to go through an Evaluation of Corrective Action Alternatives, or ECAA, process, that will provide options for remediation and abatement for our board's consideration.

The state has also provided the district with air purifiers, but to date we have not been provided with any data to indicate the efficacy of this equipment in impacting the air quality in the identified schools.

Because the ECAA process has already taken a considerable amount of time and is still ongoing, the district has also locally funded a third party estimate of our Hartford High School and Hartford Area Career and Technical School facilities so we can better understand the market value and what it would cost to fully remove the PCB source materials, and were provided with an estimate of \$104 million, which only includes the construction and not the architectural or planning work, which is typically around 12-13% percent of that cost, or any contingency, which is typically another 15%. Because of the way in which the state has laid out

the ECAA process, we will not be able to pursue actual cost estimates for related abatement and remediation project work until the ECAA is completed and our board selects one of the options that will result from that process. Needless to say, it has been incredibly challenging to communicate with our community who understandably would like to know what to anticipate in terms of cost and funding in the future, as well as the health, wellness, and safety of our school communities while we work to determine the path forward.

It is worth noting that none of what has been discussed in addressing this topic mentions the human resource and cost that has been spent on this issue. In the Hartford School District, it would be impossible to count the myriad hours that my Director of Facilities, Director of Finance, Human Resources Specialist, Principal and Assistant Principals of Hartford High School, Director and Assistant Director of the Hartford Area Career and Technical Center, Administrative Assistants, and educators and staff members have spent on planning and relocation and figuring out the complicated funding structure in relation to any of the funding we have received from the state. It has all come at considerable cost to the district, and I ask you to please also consider what that has meant for the humans who have been tirelessly working on this issue since we were identified three years ago.

Speaking of funding, while we have received “not to exceed” letters from the state that promise to cover related PCB expenditures, there have been instances of discrepancies between the “not to exceed” amount that we have received from the state and the actual cost of invoices, particularly in relation to testing, which we can provide examples of having to cover expenses from the local fund to cover the difference between what the state allotted and what the testing actually costs (for example, our most recent “not to exceed” letter from the state was for \$89,516, but the invoice from the firm for testing was \$103,922). Also, please keep in mind that at this point, until we remediate and/ or abate the PCB source materials, we will need to engage in quarterly air testing in perpetuity, adding at least a hundred thousand dollars to our local fund every year. That cost of testing this year reflects an hourly rate that increased by more than 20% from last year and will likely continue to increase compounded annually, so it is worth repeating that we are bound to quarterly testing as long as we have detectable materials in our facilities. This also does not take into account any anticipated updates, maintenance, and repairs to these facilities that would also require that we abate source materials before beginning renovation and construction projects, adding considerable cost.

As far as the funding we have received to date from the state, we have received \$308,079.94, which includes the first round of testing, through the relocation of programming, ongoing testing, and the current development of the ECAA. Since the state paused testing and had not completed testing all of the facilities in our district, we also had to use local funds to cover the cost of testing the last facility that the state had not tested and refused to pay for, which was another \$26,191.53; we did not feel like it was a choice to test the last facility, but rather that we must do so in order to ensure that our community knew that we will continue to do whatever we need to do to provide our students with safe and healthy learning environments. Current outstanding expenditures total \$135,000, with FY26 quarterly air sample testing and the ECAA process amounting to \$129,972, and while we have been told that these costs will be covered

by the state, we remain concerned about the laborious, confounding process and what the future will hold, particularly if additional schools and districts are added to the current schools and districts who are still trying to address the many costs that come with being identified as a school that contains levels of PCBs that are beyond the state's threshold.

Our hope is that the state can follow through on the promise that was made to fully fund PCB testing and any remediation and abatement necessary to ensure that our schools are safe and healthy and that our community, our local taxpayers, are not unduly and financially penalized for being among the list of schools and districts that were tested prior to the state's decision to pause PCB testing in VT.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine M. van Eyck-Sutton  
Superintendent  
Hartford School District