

Testimony to the Vermont Senate Education Committee Regarding PCB Remediation in Schools

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about PCB remediation and its impact on our school community.

My name is Rebecca Fillion, and I have served as a principal for 17 years. I am the principal of Twin Valley Elementary School, which serves 170 students in grades PreK–5.

At Twin Valley Elementary, we fully recognize and support the importance of monitoring and ensuring the safety of our students and staff. However, this work cannot be sustained without a significant and ongoing financial commitment from the State of Vermont.

We are currently completing year two of remediation and have already spent millions of dollars. We are now preparing for Phase 4 of a 9-phase plan, with this upcoming phase alone estimated to cost \$2 million. In addition, we incur approximately \$150,000 annually for quarterly air monitoring. While the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation monitors air quality, the Environmental Protection Agency oversees materials. Although we have removed a substantial amount of PCB-containing materials, some—such as the steel beam roof in our gym—have been encapsulated rather than removed. As a result, the EPA will continue to monitor our school for the lifetime of the building, or until those materials are fully removed—an action that would essentially require rebuilding a central portion of our school.

EPA requirements for quarterly to biannual testing mean that these annual costs will persist and likely increase over time. This creates an unsustainable financial burden for our district and community.

Beyond the financial impact, the disruption to teaching and learning—and the emotional toll on our community—has been profound.

In year one, we lost access to our library, gym, and main office wing, including guidance and nursing services. Physical education for younger students was held in the cafeteria, while grades 3–5 were bused to another gym in town. In year two, our gym remained closed, forcing outdoor instruction until weather conditions made that impossible, at which point classes again moved into the cafeteria under constrained conditions. Our librarian shifted to a cart model, bringing books into classrooms, which significantly reduced student access and circulation. Speech services were relocated offsite, and our mental health clinician worked out of a closet.

At the same time, staff and families have faced ongoing stress and uncertainty. Concerns about health and safety are constant. Informational meetings with the Department of Health, DEC, and our contractors have been frequent. Despite best efforts, post-remediation testing has at times shown increased PCB levels. PCBs are not well understood and are highly variable—it often feels like we are chasing something invisible and unpredictable.

Currently, we are able to occupy all spaces only because we are actively engaged in remediation. However, this summer's work will again displace key areas, including our library, speech room, technology room, and faculty space. There is significant concern about project timelines and whether we will be able to open school on schedule.

We understand and support the importance of protecting health and safety. We are committed to this work. But we ask that you also understand the full scope of its impact—financially, educationally, and emotionally.

Without sustained and substantial state funding, this is not a burden our community can continue to carry alone.

Thank you for your time and consideration.