

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7239

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT REPAIR AND
Title: IMPROVEMENT PROJECT PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 4/24/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/24/2025

File No.: 863

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Finance, Revenue, & Bonding Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

It is the aim of this bill to enhance the infrastructure of public schools across the state of Connecticut. By establishing a Public School District Repair and Improvement Project Program, this bill can hopefully improve the safety and accessibility of schools within the state and give public schools more necessary funding to maintain their buildings.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Jeffrey Beckham, Secretary, Office of Policy and Management: Jeffrey Beckham submitted testimony in opposition of this legislation because it would create a new program that is duplicative of existing bond programs, which is overseen by the Department of Administrative Services. Many of these existing programs already work towards the same goals that this new program aims to achieve.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education: CABA submitted testimony in support of this testimony because many districts do not have the means at the end of the budget year to place excess funds in their non-lapsing accounts. Districts use leftover funds at the end of the fiscal year to help with maintenance costs, but rarely enough to cover significant and necessary projects.

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director, Patrick Gibson, Deputy Executive Director, School and State Finance Projects: Patrick Gibson and Lisa Hammersley submitted testimony in support of this legislation because municipal budget constraints frequently

deprioritizes school maintenance funding, which directly impacts the health and safety of students, as well as their productivity.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kevin Brown, State Representative, CT-56: Representative Brown submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is crucial in providing funding to all state school districts for smaller-scale projects, since currently, the state only reimburses districts for large-scale projects.

Michael Passero, Mayor, New London, CT: Mayor Passero submitted testimony in support of this legislation because cities are forced to stretch their municipal budgets and as a result school repairs are often neglected. This not only puts students and teachers at risk, it costs more down the road to fix issues once they turn catastrophic.

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, CT Association of Public Schools: Fran Rabinowitz submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is the priority of superintendents to maintain safe, healthy and well-equipped learning environments and currently, there is no source of state funding to help cover these costs. As a result, minor improvement projects are neglected until they become catastrophic issues.

Nick Albini, COO, Waterbury Public Schools: Nick Albini submitted testimony in support of this legislation because a dedicated stream of funding for minor capital improvements, this program would enable them to address issues in a timely, cost-effective manner, before they grow into larger, more expensive projects.

James Rovezzi, Director of Facilities, Thomas Anderson, Superintendent, East Hartford Public Schools: James Rovezzi and Thomas Anderson submitted testimony in support of this legislation because most schools in East Hartford are upwards of 60 years old/ These aging buildings cost significantly more to maintain as each year passes. This leads to poor working, learning and teaching environments.

Mark Benigni, Superintendent, Meriden Public Schools: Mark Benigni submitted testimony in support of this legislation because maintaining school facilities is an ongoing challenge for districts across CT, particularly in high need communities such as Meriden. There is currently no dedicated source of support for the routine repairs and smaller capital improvements that are critical to keeping facilities most functional.

Kara Casimiro, Superintendent, Danbury Public Schools: Kara Casimiro submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the DRIP program will give districts the state support they need to make necessary improvements and repairs to school buildings and ensure safe, healthy learning environments for students.

Steve Rioux, Superintendent, Putnam Public Schools: Steve Rioux submitted testimony in support of this legislation because smaller districts like Putnam are constantly forced to neglect minor facility repairs and these maintenance projects will go unattended to until they reach a critical level, often costing the state more than if the matter was attended to in the first place.

Paul Brenton, Superintendent, Plainfield Public Schools: Paul Brenton submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the creation of a predictable funding source for routine school maintenance, it would allow districts to address facility issues before they escalate which ensures that students and staff have safe, healthy and modern learning environments.

Alberto Vázquez Matos, Superintendent, Middletown Public Schools: Alberto Vázquez Matos submitted testimony in support of this legislation because funding for minor yet essential repairs is often insufficient due to changes in municipal tax code. Failure to conduct routine maintenance frequently results in much more costly repairs down the road.

Joseph DiBacco, Superintendent, Ansonia Public Schools: Joseph DiBacco submitted testimony in support of this legislation because there is no current state support for minor yet necessary repairs to school districts. Because of this, districts are forced to wait until the need for repairs is urgent, and often far more expensive to fix. This endangers students and staff.

Michael Cummings, Superintendent, Pomfret Public Schools: Michael Cummings submitted testimony in support of this legislation because a district as small as the Pomfret district are constantly working to balance necessary building maintenance with limited financial resources, given that they only allocate approximately \$40k/yr for facility maintenance. This is not enough to cover their future expenses.

Steven Jackopsic, Superintendent, Union Public Schools: Steven Jacopsic submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is very difficult for smaller school districts, as is Union, to find funding for minor improvement projects while working to balance necessary building maintenance with limited financial resources.

Daniel Sullivan, Superintendent, Colchester Public Schools: Daniel Sullivan submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the municipality is currently feeling the impact of a loss in tax revenue due to changes in the motor vehicle valuation formula, and as a result, without state help, they'll have no funds for facility improvements.

Matt Geary, Superintendent, Manchester Public Schools: Matt Geary submitted testimony in support of this legislation because funding for small maintenance projects to improve school facilities benefit students and teachers, as well as the whole community by freeing up more funding for the municipality.

Joseph Macary, Superintendent, Vernon Public Schools: Joseph Macary submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it provides a consistent form of funding for districts to maintain facilities to a higher standard, which represents an investment in communities.

Steven Madancy, Superintendent, Southington Public Schools: Steven Madancy submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it represents a significant investment in supporting this state's students by providing means for districts to provide students with high quality learning environments.

Steven Moccio, Superintendent, Enfield Public Schools: Steven Moccio submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it would recognize that maintaining public school buildings is a long term responsibility that requires resources schools can count on year to year, and this program establishes exactly that.

Christopher Montini, Superintendent, Naugatuck Public Schools: Christopher Montini submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it will benefit students most in need, as the lowest income communities are often forced to neglect minor maintenance projects due to lack of municipal funds which leads to poor educational facilities.

Robert Gilbert, Superintendent, Colebrook Consolidated School, Sarah Robichaud, Chairperson, Colebrook Board of Education: Robert Gilbert and Sarah Robichaud submitted testimony in support of this legislation because Colebrook, a smaller district, is forced to constantly cut corners to keep up with growing student needs, deprioritizing minor repair projects which takes a significant toll on the health and safety of students.

Iris White, Acting Superintendent, Bristol Public Schools: Iris White submitted testimony in support of this legislation because Bristol currently faces fiscal challenges that stand in the way of school repairs. These maintenance projects will go unaddressed without state funding.

Nate Quesnel, Head of School, Norwich Free Academy: Nate Quesnel submitted testimony in support of this legislation because reducing the bureaucratic hurdles and providing districts with the flexibility to address the most pressing of maintenance challenges would allow schools to be more proactive in facility upkeep, rather than constantly playing catch-up.

Jennifer Variale, Director of Finance and Business Operations, Bethel Public Schools: Jennifer Variale submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the funds provided by the DRIP program are greatly needed specifically to maintain HVAC systems, which experience frequent failure in the district.

Colleen Clark, Chair, Southington Board of Education: Colleen Clark submitted testimony in support of this legislation because without a source of state funds dedicated to helping communities cover the costs of minor repairs and improvements to school facilities, the burden of covering small yet essential capital projects falls entirely on local taxpayers.

Laura Worosz, Chair, Redding Board of Education: Laura Worosz submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the district is often forced to stretch the budget and neglect minor maintenance projects which puts students and teachers at risk.

Jill Browne, Director of Finance, Ridgefield Public Schools: Jill Browne submitted testimony in support of this legislation because unforeseen repairs on things like HVAC and leaking roofs cause enormous financial strain on all districts. Districts are often forced to divert funding from student resources in order to make these repairs.

Patrick Bradbury, Director of Facilities, Milford Public Schools: Patrick Bradbury submitted testimony in support of this legislation because year after year, the Milford district is often faced with the choice of further funding student experience or facility maintenance, and often times this results in neglect of the latter.

Kim Neubig, Director of Finance, Regional School District 13: Kim Neubig submitted testimony in support of this legislation because maintaining school districts like hers are a significant challenge as municipal budgets often neglect minor repairs until they become significant enough to require state funding.

Sherri DiNello, Director of Government Affairs, Connecticut Association of School Business Officials: Sherri DiNello submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it addresses the need of funding for districts to maintain high quality learning environments for students. These benefits will significantly serve lower income districts with greater diversity and less municipal funds at their disposal.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, CT Council of Small Towns: Betsy Gara submitted testimony in support of this legislation because establishing the DRIP program will ensure school buildings and other educational facilities are maintained up to a high standard which will create a safe, healthy learning environments for students and educators.

Lauren Mancini-Averitt: Lauren Mancini-Averitt submitted testimony in support of this legislation because there is no state support for minor, yet necessary repairs school districts frequently need to maintain their buildings. This has forced districts to wait until the need for repairs is urgent, and often far more expensive.

Jacqueline Cabrera: Jacqueline Cabrera submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it gives school districts the opportunity and resources they need to maintain and improve the quality of school buildings on a more consistent basis. This all contributes to creating a safe, healthy, high quality learning environment.

Mary Consoli: Mary Consoli submitted testimony in support of this legislation because districts should not have to wait until there is a large problem that qualifies for reimbursement from the state in order to make necessary repairs and improvements. This puts students and educators at risk.

Sheila Daniels: Sheila Daniels submitted testimony in support of this legislation because enacting the DRIP program will give districts a predictable and sustainable source of funding and help ensure school buildings are safe, high-quality environments for students, educators and staff. This is all necessary for student success.

Lourdes Fonseca: Lourdes Fonseca submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the DRIP program will enable districts to ensure school buildings are safe and functionable for students and staff.

Carolyn Gammernan: Carolyn Gammernan submitted testimony in support of this legislation because a lack of funding for routine maintenance repairs exposes students and teachers to dangers like mold, extreme temperatures, poor lighting and inadequate ventilation. All of these create an added barrier of success to students.

Timothy Gabriel: Timothy Gabriel submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the funding for capital projects in their home town of North Haven can not afford school

improvements and wrote capital projects out of their budget, leaving the district's schools in deteriorating condition.

Jessica Hickey: Jessica Hickey submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it gives districts the opportunity and resources they need to maintain and improve the quality of school buildings on a consistent basis.

Marilina Imperati: Marilina Imperati submitted testimony in support of this legislation because students deserve better than decrepit, deteriorating learning environments.

Richard Jannelli: Richard Jannelli submitted testimony in support of this legislation because districts should not have to wait until a maintenance project becomes urgent in order to receive state funds. Ultimately, delaying maintenance is more costly in the long run.

Iris Ortiz Sanchez: Iris Ortiz Sanchez submitted testimony in support of this legislation because deteriorating learning environments dealing with mold and extreme temperatures takes a serious toll on students and teachers.

Rayna Walters: Rayna Walters submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it will ensure safe, healthy learning environments for students and teachers and ultimately saving the district in long term repair costs.

Brad Sheridan: Brad Sheridan submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the proposed DRIP program would provide districts with much needed support when it comes to minor facility repairs. Higher quality facilities will drastically improve conditions for students and teachers.

Jeffrey Sousa: Jeffrey Sousa submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it provides necessary funding that will directly benefit students and educators by improving their facilities.

Laura Stern: Laura Stern submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it will serve to benefit those in the communities of highest need as these communities are often forced to neglect minor school improvement projects due to municipal budget constraints.

Kent Tedford: Kent Tedford submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it provides the necessary funding to ensure all students and educators work in safe, healthy and high quality learning environments.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

An additional 2 pieces of testimony were submitted in general opposition.

Reported by: Griffin Olshan

Date: 5/13/25