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Washington State Senate

Senator Ken Jacobsen
46th Legislative District

WA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
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Mr. Treuman Katz, Chair
Board Members
Washington State Board of Health
P.O. Box 47990
Olympia, WA 98504-7990

Dear Mr. Katz and Members of the Board of Health:

Thank you for your dedicated efforts in addressing environmental health and safety in our state's schools. I am writing you to pledge my support in obtaining state funding to implement the new rules for school environmental health and safety, which you are now considering for adoption.

Among the new rules, I am very pleased to see that our nation's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines for dealing with contaminated drinking water and mold remediation in schools have been incorporated into the revised Washington Administrative Code, WAC 246-366A. These regulatory safeguards add to our state's increasing efforts (e.g. recent remediation of contaminated playground soils) to ensure that children have safe learning environments.

I understand that the revision of WAC 246-366 has taken approximately 4 years of public process to achieve. From public comment on the proposed rules, it is very clear that state funding is essential to implement these rules. It is now time for our government, and our society as a whole, to reaffirm the importance of health and safety in our schools.

We must also take this opportunity to reaffirm our support of public health agencies, which play a critical role in training school personnel, and monitoring the proper implementation of school environmental health rules.

There is no doubt in my mind that health and safety budgets in schools have suffered as a result our state's chronic under-funding of schools. I agree completely with the following quotes from a Feb. 1, 2007 report on school facilities deficiencies by the Washington Association of Maintenance and Operations Administrators (WAMAO):

"Unfortunately, all too often when the facility needs are in competition with educational priorities in the budget process, the facilities suffer."
... "More and more research is showing that this is a false economy and facilities should compete on the same priority level with instructional needs. The physical environment plays a major role in the

health and safety of building occupants and has a measurable impact on the teaching and learning that occurs."

The State Board of Health has heard numerous testimonies on how unsafe schools have harmed schoolchildren and teachers. These testimonies clearly illustrate why we must increase state support for public health agencies, and their training for school personnel.

The Legislature must also provide adequate funds and budgetary flexibility to school districts, so that they can repair and upgrade deteriorating school facilities.

I encourage you to complete your important work on school environmental health and safety rules this fall, before the upcoming legislative session. It is imperative that legislators recognize and respect the technical requirements of WAC 246-366A, as well as to provide adequate funding for the implementation of these requirements. Adoption of WAC 246-366A by the State Board of Health will help instruct the Legislature on critical areas where action is needed.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to make sure that the health and safety of school children is addressed as a paramount duty of our state government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Jacobsen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Ken Jacobsen, Senator
46th Legislative District - Seattle