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TO: The Honorable Arnie Roblan, Chair
Senate Education Committee

FROM: Gabriela Goldfarb, Environmental Public Health Manager
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SUBJECT: SB 1047 - Environmental Health Hazards in Schools

Chair Roblan and members of the committee; my name is Gabriela Goldfarb, and I'm the Environmental Public Health Section Manager with the Oregon Health Authority. I'm here to provide testimony on SB 1047.

To state the obvious, healthy students learn better. When we protect children from environmental health hazards in school buildings, such as neurotoxins like lead or asthma triggers like diesel engine emissions, we enhance both health and educational outcomes and investments.

SB 1047 requires the Department of Education to develop a model plan to address environmental health concerns in Oregon schools. Requiring schools to have one comprehensive environmental health plan in place would support districts so they can identify and prioritize environmental health hazards that put kids and adults at risk. Requirements for communication of the plan and sharing of any testing results fosters transparency among schools, school boards, parents, students and the greater school community.

We at OHA appreciate the comprehensive nature of this bill and have three suggestions that would increase the efficacy of the concept while decreasing the burden on schools and expense to the state.

First, we recommend a shift in focus from testing for specific environmental hazards to developing a plan to identify and address them. The bill requires testing

for two hazards, mold and carbon monoxide (CO) for which no authoritative body, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (for mold) or the Fire Marshall's office (for CO) have not established standards. In the case of mold, this is a hazard that is easily identified by sight and smell. If mold is present, time and resources are best spent identifying the moisture source causing the mold and correcting it. In the case of CO, the Fire Marshall and International Building Code have standards for installation of carbon monoxide detectors which alert occupants of elevated levels (similar to a smoke alarm.) Testing the air once would not be effective to monitor CO levels in a building.

Second, we suggest training for school personnel focus on preventing and identifying environmental health hazards. For example, staff that are effectively maintaining a building's heating, cooling and ventilation system are ensuring well oxygenated healthy indoor air and preventing health problems associated with pollutants and high levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂). There are a number of hazards, such as asbestos and lead paint repair or removal, which require specialized training to carry out safely and effectively. School communities would be best served by effectively maintaining and monitoring school facilities and bringing in environmental health professionals when environmental health testing and mitigation is necessary.

Third, OHA recommends the bill reference existing adopted state rules and federal statutes, as appropriate, for radon, asbestos, and lead paint repair and remediation. These changes would avoid duplication of rules and reduce rulemaking expense.

With these suggested changes, schools will have a good framework for assessing, transparently communicating, and effectively planning to address environmental hazards in school buildings in order to support good health and educational outcomes for the entire school community. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. I am available as a resource to the committee if there are any questions or concerns.