



222 NW Davis Street
Suite 309
Portland, OR 97209-3900
503.222.1963
www.oeconline.org

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Rules
Senate Bill 1062
Relating to Environmental Conditions in Schools
May 10, 2017**

**Angela Crowley-Koch
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council urges support for SB 1062 to require testing for toxics in schools and to provide funds, consultation and assistance to schools to support this testing.

As an organization that works at the nexus of human health and the environment, OEC recognizes the critical importance of healthful learning environments to the life-long well being of children. We support SB 1062 as a practical first step to identify high priority environmental hazards so that schools may set priorities for mitigating these hazards.

As they develop, children's brains and bodies are responding to the environment around them. Children drink, eat and breathe more than adults, taking in more contaminants pound-for-pound. Because children are uniquely vulnerable to environmental hazards, and because healthful school environments have been shown to reduce absenteeism and improve performance, an investment in healthy schools is an investment in lifetime health.

Three of the bill's provisions warrant support for their strong environmental health implications: 1) State-level responsibility, leadership and training; 2) management plans for multiple environmental hazards; and 3) public disclosure.

State level action is critical to public health: When it comes to our children and their learning environments, there is too much at stake to allow the availability of federal funding alone to determine Oregon's attention to pressing public health concerns. Under the U.S. Constitution, states hold the primary responsibility for protecting public health. Historically, federal authorities have provided research to identify public health concerns and funding for states to pursue solutions; yet it often

falls upon state and local authorities to implement protections on the ground. As environmental and health protections further devolve to the state level under the current administration, initiatives like SB1062 become even more critical. This bill is a strong proposal for Oregon to work in harmony with federal authorities, but without deferring state responsibility. This initiative would create a comprehensive and practical protocol, including training and leadership, to ensure health and safety in one of the most critical environments for public health.

Strong management plans for a range of hazards: There is no safe level of exposure for either lead or asbestos. Because these substances are persistent and bioaccumulative as well as toxic, their release into the environment creates a public health hazard that has lasting implications beyond a single incident. Mistakes, misinformation and mismanagement come at a high cost. SB 1062 ensures the education and training, as well as a clear designation of authority, to ensure that these materials are handled in a way that accounts for their uniquely hazardous properties.

SB 1062 also recognizes the need to account for the significance of cumulative exposures from multiple sources. By including diesel exhaust, carbon monoxide and mold as pollutants of concern, SB 1062 cultivates a culture and practice of awareness preparing schools to recognize and respond to a range of environmental hazards.

Public disclosure supports equity and can mobilize protections: Free and open data empowers people to make informed choices. It reduces the likelihood that misinformation or hidden information will erode public confidence in schools or create inequitable conditions in which parents or guardians have no means of participating in decision-making that affects their children's health. Furthermore, public disclosure provides an opportunity for communities to bring their full resources to bear in order to reduce health hazards.

The Oregon Environmental Council, on behalf of our members throughout Oregon, urges support for SB 1062.