

February 22, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
U.S. Senate
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
U.S. House of Representatives
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Reed and Representative Scott,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, we are writing to express our thanks and support for the Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2021 (S. 96 / H.R. 604).

Students and teachers deserve to learn and work in a building free from environmental and occupational hazards. Yet nearly 50 million students and 3 million teachers are put at risk because of crumbling school infrastructure, and many are exposed to toxins like asbestos, lead, copper, and mold. Exposure to such toxins can impair cognitive functioning and damage lung function, impacting children for the rest of their lives.

The coronavirus pandemic has only exacerbated the problem, as many schools do not have adequate ventilation systems which are key to safe reopenings and getting students and teachers back to in person learning. As students and school staff prepare to return to school, massive budget shortfalls coincide with the need for a comprehensive transformation of school facilities. To return safely, billions are needed. The Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act invests \$100 billion to transform school infrastructure as well as providing \$30 billion in bond authority to support high-poverty schools. Inequity in school funding has long been a stain on our nation and this act takes a step to mitigate compounding inequality.

In the same sense, public education has been under attack for years, embodied most abjectly in the DeVos Department of Education regime. These funds to support public schools are a step in stemming the over \$600 billion deficit states are facing -- a deficit which will, unfortunately, lead to cuts for education-- as well as decades of education underfunding, overwhelmingly concentrated in high poverty areas. We look forward to working with you to pass this bill into law and thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President