



# PHILADELPHIA *FEDERATION of TEACHERS*

**Jerry T. Jordan, President**

**Testimony in Favor of Bill No. 210685**

**Presented before Licenses and Inspections Committee**

**November 5, 2021**

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Good morning, I am Jerry Jordan, President of the more than 13,000 member Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Thank you Councilmember Green for moving this bill forward as one critical facet of a multi-pronged approach to the ongoing facilities crisis that affects far too many of our students and staff each day.

For decades, **this union has led the fight for safe and healthy school buildings.** In fact, it was in 1985 that our asbestos fight began, and the union publicly called out the District for improperly handling asbestos remediation. School communities would not reenter these schools until PFT's Health and Welfare Fund verified that they were safe. The more than 10,000 asbestos inspections in the years to follow brought about improvements to the entire remediation process.

I thought it important to highlight that early work to emphasize just how important having standards and community trust is in addressing the facilities crisis. **I have said many times that the District did not create the facilities crisis. But their responses, or lack thereof, have perpetuated problems that could, and should, have been fixed years ago.** And community trust has been shattered.

Surely, we need funding. In fact, the **PFT founded and continues to lead the Fund Our Facilities Coalition** to, in part, identify real, workable funding solutions. We have secured millions of additional dollars in local and state funding as a result of our collective efforts. And we intend to continue to advocate and fight for every dollar that we know our students so richly need and deserve.

But today, I want to focus on the **process based concerns that continue to hinder much needed progress.** On October 15th, I wrote a detailed letter to Dr. Hite outlining our concerns with the process. In my letter, which I have attached to my testimony, I outlined three main process deficiencies:

- The District's refusal to provide our Director of Environmental Science with regular access to buildings as he has had for nearly forty years.
- The District's ignoring of emergency problems submitted via our Healthy Schools Tracker App, with some problems left to languish for years.
- And the District's refusal to implement protocols that have either been in practice for years or protocols that have been agreed upon, or protocols that we have outlined that are best practices.

In the letter, I outline where this negligence has led to very real consequences in our school buildings. I hope you will look through the absolute crisis situations at The U School, Furness High School, Wright Elementary, Baldi Middle School and know that they are emblematic of issues that we are seeing District-wide. **It is absolutely imperative that Councilmember Green's bill be passed so that additional and significant oversight can be implemented swiftly.** Frankly, the response I received from Dr. Hite, which is also attached to my testimony, was inaccurate and misleading.

I would like to thank the members of Council who are members of the Fund Our Facilities Coalition, and I want to also share the letter that forty-seven (47) members of the Coalition signed and sent to Dr. Hite this week. This letter is in response to the concerns I outlined today and urges a number of specific action items, including the following:

- Immediate access to buildings for Jerry Roseman and members of his team.
- Addressing the chronic lapses in responses and remediation plans on the Healthy Schools Tracker App.
- Utilizing the policies and procedures outlined in a series of documents included with the PFT's letter.
- Implementing the recommended course of action outlined for specific schools and situations, while noting that these situations exemplify district-wide concerns.

These recommendations can, and should, be straightforward to implement. **We remain ready, willing, and able to work with the District to engage in a fully collaborative approach to the facilities crisis.**

However, our efforts have gone rebuked and rebuffed, and as such, **it is urgent that Council pass Bill 210685 to implement a critical layer of oversight that is missing from this process.**

I thank you for your time today and look forward to answering any questions you may have.