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March 5, 2018

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to submit for the record the comments below in connection with the March 6 hearing, “Examining the Administration’s Infrastructure Proposal.”

Any initiative to rebuild America’s infrastructure must include the public schools that educate 90 percent of our students. Too many of those students attend school in buildings with out-of-date technology and often unsafe, crumbling infrastructures that are more 40 years old on average. These substandard conditions are especially troubling in light of research that shows peeling paint, crumbling plaster, nonfunctioning toilets, poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, and inoperative heating and cooling systems can adversely affect students’ learning as well as their health. (Source: U.S. Department of Education)

The American Society of Civil Engineers’ [2017 Infrastructure Report Card](#) gives the overall condition of public schools a dismal D+ rating. The condition of 24 percent of public schools in permanent buildings is rated “fair” or “poor” — a figure that rises to 45 percent for public schools that use temporary buildings exclusively or in addition to permanent facilities.

To help ensure that our nation’s public schools are in good repair and equipped with modern technology — especially in low-income and rural areas where the need is often greatest — the federal government and the states need to work together and explore approaches ranging from grants for school modernization to innovative financing mechanisms. Not only is this the right thing to do — for students, educators, and communities — it will create jobs and encourage economic growth. According to the [Economic Policy Institute](#), every \$1 billion dollars invested in construction creates nearly 18,000 jobs.

We also urge Congress to reinstate the popular and successful Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) program, which the recently passed tax bill inexplicably eliminated. A proven approach that is both efficient and cost-effective, QZABs helped finance school improvements in every state for two decades. Investors receive a federal tax credit equal to the amount of interest payable on the bonds, thereby relieving local taxpayers and municipalities of the interest burden. A school that is awarded a QZAB may use the funds to renovate and repair buildings, invest in equipment, and update technology.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association