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## LEGISLATOR/LABOR ANNOUNCE ATTACK

on the

### "SICK BUILDING SYNDROME"

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Representative Marilyn Travinski (D-Southbridge), House Chairman of the Legislature's Commerce and Labor Committee, today (4-4-89) launched a drive toward improving indoor air quality in Massachusetts.

At a Boston news conference, Rep. Travinski outlined the major points of the bill she is sponsoring (H.2771) which would require the testing of air quality in office buildings, schools, hospitals, and other workplaces throughout the Commonwealth. The bill would also establish guidelines on preventive and remedial actions to combat the "sick building syndrome", and provides for enforcement capability up to and including the shutdown of inadequately ventilated and polluted buildings.

(fact sheet on sick building syndrome attached)

Rep. Travinski says, "The sick building syndrome has been with us too long. Contaminants trapped in our many hermetically-sealed office towers and smaller commercial and public buildings have provoked illness among too many of our employees at a physical cost to them, and a financial cost to their employers in lower productivity and higher absenteeism. It is definitely time to address the health and efficiency problems by setting a standard for clean indoor air."

Rep. Travinski points out that the cost of cleaning up our workplace air need not be high. In almost half

(more)

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the cases investigated nationally, it has been found that the sick building can be cured by cleaning and maintaining the ventilation system's duct work and filters, and by allowing for a greater intake of fresh air from outdoors.

The bill has the support of all the major labor unions in the Commonwealth.

Joseph Faherty, President of Local 387 U.W.U.A. office, technical, and professional workers union (Boston region), gave a good indication of the reason for their support when he read a sampling of the complaints his union's members have filed over illness related to pollution in the office environment.

Faherty said, "The reports of headache, nausea, eye irritation, sore throats, and constant fatigue coming in from our members are remarkable in number. It's clear to us that polluted indoor air is to blame. The problem now is to set a standard for indoor air quality in the workplace and work with employers to remedy their ventilation systems and our members' illnesses. H.2771 will help us get that job done".

Environmental engineer Frank Powell, director of the Indoor Air Quality Program of the National Energy Management Institute, in addressing the news conference, provided statistical and scientific data on the "sick building syndrome".

Powell said that surveys indicate that 50% of the occupants of buildings contaminated with fungus, gases, or chemicals in the air report chronic headaches and eye irritation, compared to just 15% of the general population.

Powell says the causes of worker illness range from the formaldehyde used in carpet glue to bacteria bred in dirty ventilators.

He also pointed out that in most cases of "sick building syndrome" worker illness and complaints stop soon after the ventilation system is cleaned and the source of the contamination is removed.

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## Sick Building Syndrome - - - fact sheet

The modern trend toward the construction of air-tight, energy-efficient buildings has led to indoor systems which trap and recycle airborne contaminants into a sealed and stagnant environment.

The investigation of hundreds of "sick building syndrome" complaints has resulted in the finding that in nearly half of the cases (48%) was inadequate intake of fresh air and poor maintenance of the building's ventilation system.

- The World Health Organization reports that some 30% of new and remodeled office buildings are believed to cause health problems.
- Workers in sick buildings frequently suffer from headaches, eye irritation, sore throats, nausea, and excessive fatigue.
- The sick building syndrome is believed to account for millions of lost workdays in the U.S. each year, and lower productivity among those at the workplace.
- Non-industrial (office buildings, schools, etc.) workplace air pollution is "one of the most elusive varieties of environmental contamination and one of the last to be regulated". (Washington Post 5-24-88) Federal and/or state standards have yet to be set.

### ***Common Indoor Air Pollutants***

- Fungi, spores and bacteria, such as the deadly Legionnaire's disease, which can grow in heating vents and air-conditioning systems.
- Ozone, emitted from photocopiers.
- Methyl alcohol from duplicators.
- Asbestos, which is often found in old buildings.
- Smoke from cigarettes or grills.
- Formaldehyde, which is found in newer buildings and in new furniture.
- Fiberglass particles.
- Carbon monoxide drawn in from underground garages or the street.
- Shampoo build-up in carpets.