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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **SENATE PASSES DOWNING'S BILL TO IMPROVE AIR QUALITY ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES**

**Boston-** State Senator Benjamin B. Downing (D-Pittsfield) is pleased to announce that today during its formal session the Massachusetts Senate passed his legislation prohibiting school buses, commercial and personal vehicles from idling on school property.

“This bill is an opportunity for Massachusetts to guarantee cleaner air on school grounds while saving our school districts significant fuel and maintenance costs and promoting positive climate change measures.” said Downing. “I am so pleased that my Senate colleagues joined me in passing this legislation.”

*An Act to Improve School Campus Air Quality* compliments existing programming administered by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). DEP's Idling Reduction Toolkit aids cities and towns in their efforts to reduce idling and improve air quality. To date, forty communities statewide, including Egremont and Williamstown, participated in this campaign. Still other towns, such as Lenox, have developed their own response to unnecessary vehicle idling on school grounds.

After attending local Step It Up events last spring urging national action on global warming, Downing was inspired to craft this legislation by Rick Gregg, Lenox resident and Chairman for the “Idle-Free” Massachusetts Campaign of the American Lung Association. The bill, filed last September and co-sponsored by 48 legislators, has moved relatively swiftly through the legislative process thus far.

“More than one million children and teenagers attend school in Massachusetts each day,” said Gregg. “Motor vehicle exhaust is highly toxic to human health and the environment, and many chemicals found in these fumes are identical to those found in tobacco smoke. This bill will ensure that our children, teachers, staff, school bus drivers and visitors are able to breathe cleaner, healthier air. I applaud Senator Downing and his colleagues for passing this bill.”

“The air is a public trust- we must work to improve and protect it. By eliminating engine idling and the pollution that comes from it at our schools, we will be providing healthier air for our children to breathe. We applaud the passage of this legislation and its intent to improve public health,” said Jeffrey Seyler, President and CEO of the American Lung Association of New England.

This legislation addresses many pressing issues facing policy-makers in the Commonwealth, such as air quality, public health, environmental stewardship and transportation costs. Across the state, over 9,000 school buses and 770 school vehicles transport nearly 750,000 children to school each day. Children board idling buses that fill the air with dangerous emissions, running cars waiting to pick children up from school also contribute to this pollution. This unnecessary idling pumps added carbon dioxide into playground air, while school ventilation systems draw in these harmful fumes and re-circulate them throughout school buildings. Children breathe up to 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults, making them more susceptible to both acute and chronic respiratory problems including asthma, the leading source of chronic illness among children and leading cause of school absenteeism.

School buses “idle-away” an average of 1.35 million gallons of fuel annually. With fuel prices topping \$3.00 per gallon, this legislation will save school districts statewide over \$4 million each year.

Contrary to common belief, warming engines before driving does not improve fuel efficiency. Ten seconds of idling uses more fuel than turning the engine off. Idling increases maintenance costs because it leaves fuel residues that contaminate motor oil and clog fuel injectors. Vehicles idling 10 minutes per day waste more than 29 gallons of fuel each year.

This is the first bill drafted and sponsored by Downing to be engrossed by the Senate. The proposal is now before the House of Representatives for further action.

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