

# Federal concrete fix?

## Bill would help with school foundations

By Eric Bedner  
ebedner@journalinquirer.com

WASHINGTON — A bill working its way through Congress includes money that could help fix the Birch Grove Primary School in Tolland that's plagued with the same crumbling concrete foundation problem as many area residential and commercial properties.

With a push from U.S. Rep. Joseph D. Courtney, the House Education and Labor Committee, of which Courtney is a senior member, passed legislation Tuesday that includes provisions that would add pyrrhotite-laden crumbling foundations to a list of "severe health and safety threats" to schools.

The legislation also includes a proposal by Courtney that would create a grant program

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# School foundations in bill

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for schools to repair or replace foundations that are deteriorating due to pyrrhotite.

Under the proposal, the U.S. secretary of education would be required to create a program within 180 days of enactment that would provide funding to states to distribute as grants for crumbling foundation repairs or replacements. It also would offer reimbursements for repairs made five years before the bill is enacted.

Local officials would have to show evidence that a school's foundation contains pyrrhotite through scientific or visual inspections.

To qualify for the federal dollars, the state would have to contribute at least 40 percent of the project's total cost, and the federal government would contribute more than half.

Funds could be used to restore the structural integrity of a school and to pay for engineering reports, architectural design, core tests, and other aspects of remediation, but not for anything not directly related to the foundation.

Courtney, D-2nd District, said he was already an advocate on the issue of crumbling foundations

affecting homeowners and business owners, but the revelation that Birch Grove's foundation contains pyrrhotite spurred his action.

Tolland officials have said Birch Grove school probably would have to be replaced within the next 10 years at a cost of between \$35 million and \$45 million.

Courtney said that Tuesday's decision is recognition that federal assistance is needed and "a great victory for these communities."

U.S. Sen. John B. Larson, D-1st District, wrote to the committee chairman, U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., in support of Courtney's amendment, noting that the issue has spread to Massachusetts due to its proximity to the former concrete company in Stafford at the center of the issue.

Tolland School Superintendent Walter Willett said he is "encouraged and hopeful and optimistic" by the advancement of the legislation.

"I couldn't be happier that he's taking up the cause for towns like Tolland in Connecticut," Willett said. "I appreciate the support from the federal government and legislators. They're bringing light into the darkness around this issue."