



THE VALLEY PATRIOT

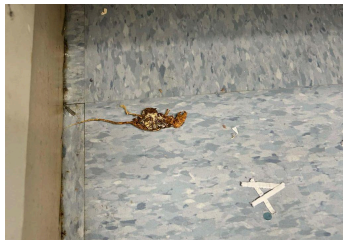
"Congress shall make no law..."



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Methuen Education Association Links Rats, Sanitation Needs, Staffing Shortage and Funding Crisis *By Tom Duggan*

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Skeleton of a dead rat found a few weeks ago at the Timony School

METHUEN — The rodent problem in several schools and heating system failure Monday in the high school are part of a larger funding crisis city officials are forcing upon Methuen Public Schools and the district's employees.

The members of the Methuen Education Association have for years been pointing out health and safety issues in Methuen Public Schools, as well as proposing solutions. The mayor formed a health and safety task force that does not include educators is typical of the disregard educators in Methuen have been facing throughout negotiations for a new contract.

Furthermore, newly elected Mayor D.J. Beauregard has regrettably taken an antagonistic approach and blamed without a shred of evidence educators for being responsible for the rodent infestation in some schools.

The MEA is calling on the mayor, school committee and superintendent to work cooperatively with educators on creating schools Methuen students and families deserve.

"The staffing shortages and sanitation issues are related," said Kara Blatt, co-president of the MEA. "It all comes down to properly funding our schools."

Methuen has been reducing its local contribution to school spending, diminishing the impact of increased state funding the city receives through the Student Opportunity Act.

The city has been building up reserve accounts while allowing wages to languish at poverty levels for paraprofessionals. The low wages have led to dozens of vacancies in jobs that are crucial to the delivery of special education services and forced the district to rely on temporary contract help.

"Our fight for a fair contract is centered on creating a learning environment that meets the needs of all students. That means having fully staffed, clean and safe schools. Our contract proposals are fiscally responsible while correcting the city's corrosive trend of underfunding our schools," said MEA Co-President Sue Pierce. "The MEA is committed to finding collaborative solutions that benefit students and educators. But we will not be bullied into settling a contract that continues to undermine our ability to do our best work with students."

