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LD 1877

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Jacob Goldstone, and I am a Teaching Strategist at King Middle School in Portland, Maine. I am here to express my strong support for Maine 131 - HP 1202, a bill that promises to significantly impact the lives of our students and their families.

At my school, over 50% of our students who are economically disadvantaged. More than 10% are classified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. 38% of our students were born outside the U.S., many arriving as asylum seekers. The hardships these families endure outside of school have a profound effect on their children's academic success and overall well-being.

This bill is a step towards addressing the deep-rooted issues of poverty that affect our students. It's not just about improving student performance and helping them with the much needed growth in the wake of a challenging pandemic; it's about stabilizing the environment in which our children grow and learn. As educators, our effectiveness is often hampered by the ripple effects of these socioeconomic challenges, leading to higher turnover among teachers and administrators, which in turn, creates a cycle of instability for our students.

I'd like to highlight a poignant instance that illustrates the real-world impact of this issue. A year ago, a woman, a single mother with four children, was poised to join our school staff. Yet, due to bureaucratic delays in renewing her work permit, her start date has been indefinitely postponed. Despite this setback, she has shown unwavering commitment to our school, working at our school as a full time volunteer. For the past year she has been receiving TANF benefits, but they have been woefully inadequate. At times, we as a school community have stepped in to help her with basic needs - food, money to pay bills, and furniture for her children - things that every human being should have access to, but were out of reach given the meager benefits this incredible person was receiving. This situation is a stark reminder that our current system often fails those who are most eager to contribute and succeed. It's not a tale of dependency, but one of resilience and a clear demonstration of the inadequacy of our current support systems.

Maine 131 - HP 1202 offers tangible solutions, such as increased child support pass-throughs, special housing allowances, and essential support for transportation. These are not merely financial aids; they are lifelines that can break the cycle of poverty and enable families to thrive, thereby positively impacting our students' educational experiences.

I urge the committee to support this bill. It's an investment in the future of our children and the overall betterment of our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.