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As a public education professional with over 30 years of experience working in public education I am very concerned about this issue. According to reports from Maine Public and the Maine Department of Education, the number of homeless students in Maine during the 2022-2023 school year was over 4,400.

This number represents a large jump compared to previous years, attributed to a severe lack of affordable housing in the state.

Education is a fundamental right, yet for students experiencing homelessness in Maine, accessing a stable and supportive learning environment can be incredibly challenging. Without financial assistance, these students face significant barriers that hinder their ability to succeed in school. Maine should provide dedicated funding for students experiencing homelessness to ensure they have the resources needed to thrive academically and personally.

First, homelessness creates severe obstacles to academic success. Students without stable housing often struggle with inconsistent attendance, lack of school supplies, and difficulty concentrating due to hunger or stress. According to national studies, students experiencing homelessness are more likely to drop out of school than their housed peers. By providing direct financial support—such as covering transportation, meal programs, and school supplies—Maine can help these students stay in school and maintain their education despite their hardships.

Additionally, funding would provide access to essential services that go beyond academics. Many students facing homelessness lack access to hygiene products, medical care, or a safe place to study. Financial support could help schools connect these students with counselors, healthcare providers, and after-school programs, ensuring their well-being both inside and outside the classroom. When basic needs are met, students can focus on learning instead of worrying about survival.

Some may argue that schools should not be responsible for addressing homelessness, as it is a broader societal issue. However, schools are often the most stable part of a homeless student's life, making them the ideal place to provide support. Investing in these students not only improves their individual futures but also strengthens communities by breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

In conclusion, Maine must fund students experiencing homelessness to give them a fair chance at education and success. By addressing their unique challenges through financial assistance and essential services, the state can ensure that every student—regardless of their housing situation—has the opportunity to learn, grow, and build a brighter future.