

Good afternoon, Chair Rafferty and Co-Chair Pierce, and Committee Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Julie Orrego, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. Our mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and advocate for solutions to these problems. Preble Street's Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter is one of four shelters for homeless youth in Maine. Youth who utilize the Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter connect with caseworkers to meet their basic needs and access other services, such as health care, employment, housing, and education.

Every day, Preble Street sees the challenges that students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity face, like moving from one school district to another, living in unsafe conditions or an unstable family situation, and lacking things like weather-appropriate clothing, medical care, transportation, technology, and even prescription glasses. Many young people have experienced extensive trauma. For many youths, school is a safe space.

Preble Street strongly supports LD 193 because it helps ensure that every student can succeed academically, regardless of their housing status. This bill specifies that the .05 added weight to a school's budget for each student experiencing homelessness can be used for students in grades K-12. This will support youth of all ages who may be experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Far too many youths in our state face the monumental burden and challenge of homelessness. According to the 2024 Point in Time Count, 19.5% of all households experiencing homelessness had at least one child (under 18). This bill will provide critical additional resources and support for students to succeed.

Preble Street urges you to pass this legislation because it invests in a better future for young people in our state. Every student deserves the opportunity to achieve their full potential without having their socioeconomic status standing in the way.