

Mayor and Council Offices

Mark Dion

Mayor

March 3, 2025



Testimony of Mayor of the City of Portland, Mark Dion

In Support of

LD 193, An Act to Fund Students in Maine Schools Who Are Experiencing Homelessness
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Mark Dion, Mayor of Portland and I write to provide testimony in support of LD 193 on behalf of the City of Portland. Nearly 70,000 Mainers call Portland home and approximately 6,000 students attend our seventeen public schools. LD 193 is critical legislation that would address an important need in education.

Over the last four years, the Portland Public Schools has served an average of more than 600 students experiencing homelessness per year – approximately 10 percent of our total student population. In 2020, Portland Public Schools served a total of 420 students; in 2021, we served 353 students; in 2022, we served 846 students; in 2023, we served 823 students; and this school year, as of November 2024, we had already identified over 600 students classified as McKinney-Vento. To illustrate the gravity of the housing challenges in Portland, the district identifies an average of five students every day who are either at risk of becoming homeless or are already experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness creates barriers for students in accessing and succeeding in their education. With the housing crisis in Portland, unfortunately, many families have to find housing in other towns which may not have the appropriate services that are found in Portland. In some cases, families have been moved from one shelter to another or one hotel to another. There are also families who sleep in very temporary shelters, such as a church. This type of shelter is only for sleeping and availability changes everyday. Any one of these situations contributes to unstable school attendance, arriving late for school, difficulty accessing after-school opportunities, social- emotional difficulties, and constant interruption in schooling due to transfers, etc. All of these factors are barriers to educational success and pose challenges for school districts.

The proposed funding in LD 193 would go to the costs associated with to the increasing number of students experiencing homelessness in the past four years. Those costs to PPS in identifying and serving this student population include additional staffing as well as non-personnel costs associated with transportation, supplies, and other services. Personnel expenses have included a full-time McKinney-Vento liaison, a full-time McKinney-Vento social worker, and a

part-time Street Academy teacher for students at Portland's Teen Shelter. An example of non-personnel costs include alternative transportation for McKinney-Vento students enrolled in one of the Portland schools who are sleeping in various locations throughout the city or outside the city.

There are long-term societal benefits in providing appropriate programs and supports for McKinney-Vento students. It is a chance to break the cycle of poverty. Education is key to lifting students out of homelessness and poverty, leading to better future employment and stability. It also helps create stronger communities. Ensuring all students receive an education benefits society as a whole by reducing long-term social service dependency and increasing economic contributions.

LD 193 will help school districts provide the necessary services that are required to assist this vulnerable population.

For these reasons, the City of Portland supports LD 193 and we ask that you do as well. With appreciation for your time and your consideration of this Portland perspective.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Dion", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Dion
Mayor
City of Portland, Maine