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Maine Mayors Coalition Testimony on LD 747, An Act to Provide Funds to Reduce Student Homelessness

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, the Maine Mayors Coalition is providing testimony in support of LD 747, An Act to Provide Funds to Reduce Student Homelessness.

The Maine Mayors Coalition is a nonpartisan group representing the mayors of eleven Maine communities – Auburn, Bangor, Biddeford, Lewiston, Portland, Rockland, Saco, Sanford, South Portland, Waterville and Westbrook – and nearly 300,000 residents. The Coalition advocates on behalf of our citizens and municipalities for policies that recognize the vital services Maine cities provide and the positive impact Maine cities have on our state. The Coalition seeks to work in partnership with state and federal elected officials to meet the needs of Maine people.

One of our most important obligations as public officials is to our young people – they are Maine’s future. Ensuring they receive a quality education prepares them to become contributing members of society.

As you’re well aware, some students face extraordinary challenges in their lives. One such challenge for a growing number of students is not having basic shelter. Over the last few years, municipalities of all sizes have seen more and more students experiencing homelessness.

Among our Coalition members, Lewiston has 420 unhoused students. Auburn reported 234 for the 2023/2024 school year and expects to meet or exceed that number in this school year. Biddeford has 200 unhoused students, South Portland 150, Saco 150 and Westbrook 122. That is close to 1,300 unhoused students in just these six cities. Given fluctuating economic conditions and the state’s lack of affordable housing, we expect these numbers will continue to rise, not fall.

We fully support providing unhoused students with rental assistance as proposed in LD 747. It would be much more beneficial – for them, for our cities and for our state – to spend their formative years receiving a quality education instead of worrying about their housing situations.

We ask you to support LD 747 and the funding it would appropriate to Maine State Housing Authority’s Rental Assistance Program for Homeless Students. Thank you for your time.