

The Oxford Hills School District M.S.A.D. #17

Heather Manchester, Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools,
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March 19, 2025

Re: Testimony to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, in support of LD 384, *An Act to Prevent Student Homelessness*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the committee,

My name is Heather Manchester, and I am the Superintendent of Schools for MSAD #17 in the Oxford Hills. I support LD 385, *An Act to Prevent Student Homelessness*. If adopted, this bill will significantly support Maine students and families.

The Preventing Student Homelessness Grant is a lifeline for Maine families facing crisis, a critical safety net that prevents hardship and ensures our most vulnerable children have a chance to thrive. This past winter alone, the grant prevented unthinkable hardship for multiple families in our district.

In one instance, we had a family with four young children facing the Maine winter with no heat. Their heating oil tank was empty, and they had no resources to refill it. The Preventing Student Homelessness Grant allowed us to step in and provide emergency fuel, preventing them from facing the bitter cold without warmth.

In another instance, we encountered a family of six, including three elementary children, living in the dark. Their electricity had been shut off for over four weeks. They resorted to periodically running a generator, relying on fuel brought up from Massachusetts by a grandparent. This grant allowed us to work with CMP to restore their power, bringing light and normalcy back into their lives.

We also encountered a family battling the cold with a failing furnace and no heating oil. The father had resorted to buying five-gallon buckets of K-1 to try and fuel the furnace. The grant enabled us to partner with Dead River Company to deliver heating oil, providing safe and reliable warmth during a particularly harsh cold snap.

Finally, we were able to support an unaccompanied youth living outside the district who lacked transportation. We used the grant to provide busing so the student could attend school and also access driver's education, offering a pathway to greater independence.

The bill to establish the Student Homelessness Prevention Program within the Department of Education will provide a vital safety net for families on the verge of hardship and will allow some of our most vulnerable students an opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and your service to the students and educators of our state.

Sincerely,

Heather Manchester
Superintendent of Schools, MSAD#17

