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My name is Benjamin Cates and I am a resident of Portland. I am here today in support of the bill before the committee today.

I have spent almost the entirety of my adult life either in school, whether as a student or an employee. I have spent time working in K-12, higher education, and time working with homeless youth, many of whom were here seeking asylum. In every instance, the youth and young adults that I worked with have wanted to contribute to society. To be able to contribute, they need an education. To get an education, they need to know that school is a safe place for them. For most of my time, it was safe, at least in terms of immigration enforcement. That has now changed.

In September of last year, ICE abducted a parent from the dropoff area outside Talbot Community School. Just last Thursday, as part of the administration's cruelly named Operation Catch and Release, immigration agents abducted someone on Deering Street in Portland, in front of the University of Southern Maine's new Crewe Center for the Arts and in sight of the former Law School building. I have heard from students who directly cite these instances as reasons that they are afraid to come to class. Faced with the choice between safety and an education, who wouldn't choose safety? Most of the students I currently support are working through their college education. It is not a big jump to imagine they are also scared to go to work. This could be solved with a simple change, which is simultaneously a return to years of common-sense policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on this bill. Thank you!