

I am writing this in support of LD 2106. As someone who came to this country and immediately enrolled in Maine's public school system, it is extremely heartbreaking to see and hear about students' experiences during these traumatic times. Schools are supposed to serve as a safe haven for children. They help children socialize, learn from those around them, and nurture their growth. When I first arrived, schools were one of the only places where I could build community, which is true for many children. I met students and teachers who were similar to me—immigrants—and I also met students and teachers who were drastically different from me, whether racially or socioeconomically. From both groups, I learned so much, and I still deeply cherish those experiences. School environments allowed me to learn about others and about myself.

However, with the recent escalation of ICE detaining people, the safe haven that a significant number of students found in schools has been shattered, with parents being taken after dropping off or picking up their children from school. As a result, all students deserve to feel safe at school and to prioritize their education, and parents should not have to shelter in place out of fear that taking their children to school, grocery shopping for their families, or going to work to provide for them will result in detainment.

Many immigrant parents have made it their life mission to instill the value of education in their children. For immigrant families, education represents stability, opportunity, and hope for a better future, and it is often seen as the most powerful way to honor the sacrifices that brought them to this country. For individuals with little to no existing ties to the U.S., education is also one of the only viable paths to upward mobility and long-term stability. It is heartbreaking to watch these children's right and desire for education be impeded due to fear caused by the U.S. government. Every child deserves the right to education, and passing LD 2106 will help ensure that these children are able to exercise that right.

Additionally, it is extremely important to consider the education gap in this country and how students being too scared to attend school further widens that gap. According to the Economic Policy Institute, "children who start behind stay behind," and although the achievement gap is strongly correlated with students' social class, it would be remiss of us to ignore the significant ties between race and social class. For many immigrant students, attending public schools is just the start of their education in the U.S., and as stated before, if they are unable to attend school, not only will they be starting behind (such as multilingual learners who are still learning English), but they will also stay behind—not just academically, but socially as well—especially when schools serve as spaces for socialization and community. Therefore, it is extremely important that their education is prioritized rather than setting these students up for failure.