

February 20, 2026

My name is Priscila Bitencourt, and I serve as the Homeless Liaison for Portland Public Schools. I am here today to strongly advocate for the renewal of these critical bills, LD 384 and LD 747, which directly support some of our most vulnerable students and families.

Every day, I work with students who are experiencing homelessness—students living in shelters, motels, cars, or doubled up with other families due to economic hardship. These young people come to school carrying burdens far heavier than their backpacks. Yet despite the instability they face, they show up ready to learn. These grants ensure that when they walk through our doors, they are met not with barriers, but with opportunities.

The funding provided through these grants makes tangible, measurable differences in students' educational outcomes. It allows us to connect families with community resources that stabilize housing and improve attendance.

When students have access to these supports, we see clear educational advantages. Attendance improves. Behavioral referrals decrease. Students demonstrate stronger academic growth. Most importantly, they begin to feel a sense of belonging and stability—two factors that are foundational for learning.

Without this grant, many of our students would face interruptions that could permanently derail their education. Research consistently shows that housing instability significantly increases the risk of grade retention, chronic absenteeism, and dropping out. This funding interrupts that trajectory. It transforms crisis into continuity.

I have seen firsthand how access to these resources changes lives. I have watched students who once struggled with daily uncertainty go on to graduate, enroll in college, and pursue meaningful careers. I have seen our numbers of students experiencing homelessness drop. The difference was not ability—it was access. This grant provides that access.

Renewing this funding is not simply a budget decision. It is a commitment to educational equity. It affirms that every child, regardless of housing status, deserves the same opportunity to succeed.

On behalf of the students and families we serve, I respectfully urge you to renew this grant and continue investing in a program that delivers measurable impact and lasting change.

Thank you for your time and your continued support of our students.

Respectfully,

Priscila Bitencourt