



## Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer  
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

### Testimony

### In Support

### LD 1609: An Act to Prevent Student Homelessness

Mallory Cook – Director on Training and Early Educator Engagement, Maine Education Association

Before the Housing Committee

February 21, 2023

Senator Pearce, Representative Gere, and other esteemed members of the Joint Select Committee on Labor and Housing,

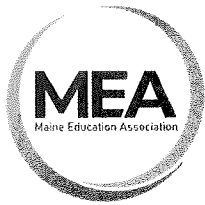
My name is Mallory Cook (pronouns she/her/hers), and I am the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement at the Maine Education Association, as well as a certified English teacher and Building Administrator. I am here to provide testimony in support of LD 1609: *An Act to Prevent Student Homelessness*.

In February, a former student reached out seeking a letter of recommendation. He was applying to UMaine's Electrical Engineering program. Reviewing his transcript, it would have been easy to assume there were very few barriers for him. A frequent flier on the honor roll list, his GPA was stellar. But his proudest accomplishment is one that might surprise those who don't know him well - maintenance of that GPA during his freshman and sophomore year, all while living in a hotel with his mom and brother. Two years in a hotel. Despite those barriers, he persevered; the unfortunate reality, though, is that he is the exception; a growing number of students find themselves in these situations and simply cannot persevere. Another student found themselves bouncing between various weekly-rate hotels, their toddler sibling in tow, doing their very best to keep up with the work. The district tried to arrange transportation, based on the student's location, but it wasn't always guaranteed. The student would lock themselves in the bathroom trying to complete homework or read, but these conditions were not suitable for learning.

In 2023, the number of students who are homeless, doubling up, or living in a hotel, motel, or shelter is growing at a startling rate. As a former educator, I know that many of the children reflected in those numbers will not see the same school system for the full year. Some are lucky to make it a few months. This high mobility has a significant impact on their learning; Maine is committed to local control in our schools; therefore, curriculum, pacing, supports, staffing, and culture can look vastly different from one school to another just down the road. Imagine walking into an Algebra course mid-year. Considering this, it is no surprise that homeless students are 87% more likely to drop out of school than their peers with stable housing conditions. In Maine, that means we have (on record), 4,372 children who are 87% more likely to drop out of school than their peers.

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While the solution to addressing the needs of our most vulnerable students is multi-pronged, LD 1609 is a great step in helping families to establish stable housing with functioning utilities. Because the American Rescue Plan Funds expire in September of 2024, and the number of students impacted by housing instability continues to grow, the time to act is now.

Thank you for your time and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

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