

Biddeford Schools

*est. 1818*

Saco Schools

Dayton Consolidated

## **Testimony in Support of LD 193**

February 26, 2025

Chair Rafferty, Chair Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of LD 193, which would establish a weighted count for students experiencing homelessness in the Essential Programs and Services funding formula.

As the superintendent serving the communities of Biddeford, Saco, and Dayton, I witness firsthand the unique and significant challenges faced by our homeless student population. These challenges not only impact the students themselves but create additional responsibilities for our school districts that are currently unrecognized in our funding formula.

### **The Growing Crisis of Student Homelessness**

In recent years, we have seen a concerning increase in student homelessness across our districts. This is not merely a housing issue—it represents a complex educational challenge that requires specialized resources and support systems. Students experiencing homelessness face numerous obstacles to educational success, including:

- Inconsistent attendance and higher mobility between schools
- Lack of quiet spaces for homework and studying
- Limited access to basic necessities like food, clothing, and hygiene supplies
- Heightened emotional and psychological stress
- Difficulty participating in extracurricular activities
- Challenges with transportation to and from school

These obstacles lead to higher rates of substance use and abuse, high-risk behaviors, engagement with law enforcement, imprisonment, and drastically higher rates of dropping out of school.

Classrooms, schools, and districts with high levels of homelessness must program differently and provide a higher level of support than is typically needed. The concentration of homeless students in certain schools creates unique challenges that require specialized approaches to instruction, social-emotional support, and family engagement. These needs extend beyond what our standard educational programs can address without additional resources.

### **A Fiscally Responsible Approach to a Growing Challenge**

The current ED 279 funding formula does not adequately account for these challenges. While we have mechanisms to recognize additional needs for economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and special education students, we have no such acknowledgment for homeless students who often require even more intensive supports.

This is not about expanding government, but rather about making smart investments now that will reduce long-term costs to our communities and state. Without proper educational support, homeless students are more likely to require expensive interventions later through social services, healthcare, public safety, and corrections systems.

In practice, our districts must divert resources from other areas to provide:

- Additional transportation services beyond standard routes and thousands of person-hours and tens of thousands of road miles transporting homeless students
- Specialized staff training on trauma-informed teaching practices
- Extended day programming and academic support services
- Coordination with social services and community organizations
- Basic necessity supplies that other students would typically have at home
- Mental health supports and counseling services

## **Why a 0.50 Weight Makes Practical Sense**

The proposed 0.50 weight in LD 193 is both reasonable and necessary. It recognizes that serving homeless students requires approximately 50% more resources than serving housed students with similar academic profiles. This additional weighting would help sustain the critical services we already provide to homeless students, which include:

- Extended transportation services beyond regular routes to ensure consistent attendance, often requiring specialized arrangements to accommodate temporary housing locations
- Comprehensive mental health and counseling supports to address trauma and instability experienced by homeless students
- Food security programs including weekend backpacks, extended meal programs, and connections to community food resources
- Housing navigation assistance for families, helping them access shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing opportunities
- Provision of basic necessities including clothing, hygiene supplies, school materials, and other items that housed students typically have readily available
- Extended learning opportunities and academic interventions to address gaps caused by high mobility and attendance challenges

## **Accountability and Results-Focused Approach**

This proposal is not about simply spending more money. It's about ensuring accountability in our educational system by properly aligning resources with demonstrated needs. By incorporating this weighted count into the EPS formula, we create transparency around these expenses and can better measure outcomes against investments.

Furthermore, this change would bring stability and predictability to district budgeting. Currently, we experience significant fluctuations as our homeless population changes, often unpredictably.

Having a weighted count would allow us to plan more effectively and ensure consistent services regardless of population shifts.

## **A Maine Solution to a Maine Problem**

This legislation is about local control and empowering communities to address their specific challenges. School districts across our state—rural, suburban, and urban alike—are seeing increases in student homelessness. This weighted count would provide districts the flexibility to develop solutions that work for their unique circumstances without mandating specific programs.

## **Conclusion**

Now is the time for action. Our homeless student populations continue to grow, and the resources required to serve them effectively continue to strain our budgets. The proposed 0.50 weight represents a fair and reasonable adjustment to reflect the true cost of educating these vulnerable students.

This should not be a partisan issue. Both sides of the aisle can agree that investing in education that leads to self-sufficiency and productivity is fiscally responsible and morally right. Supporting LD 193 reflects our shared Maine values of personal responsibility, community support, and creating pathways to independence and success.

It is also a statement that we understand and value the hard work of Maine educators who are on the front lines supporting the needs of our changing communities and the struggles that families face. Every day, teachers, counselors, and staff go above and beyond to ensure homeless students can succeed despite their circumstances. This legislation acknowledges their dedication and provides them with the resources they need to continue this essential work.

I urge the committee to support LD 193. This legislation would create a more equitable funding system that recognizes the real challenges faced by districts with significant homeless populations. Most importantly, it would help ensure that all Maine students, regardless of their housing status, have access to the educational opportunities they deserve and the chance to become productive, taxpaying citizens of our state.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information that might assist the committee in its deliberations.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Ray', is written over the typed name.

Jeremy Ray

Superintendent Biddeford, Saco, and Dayton School Departments