



## Maine Education Association

**Jesse Hargrove** *President*  
**Beth French** *Vice President*  
**Jaye Rich** *Treasurer*  
**Rebecca Cole** *NEA Director*  
**Rachelle Bristol** *Executive Director*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Mallory Cook, and I have the pleasure of serving the nearly 24,000 members of the Maine Education Association as the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement. I am here today to testify in support of *LD 193: An Act to Fund Students in Maine Schools Who Are Experiencing Homelessness*.

Recently, I've had the sincere honor of working closely with our members in Biddeford, a close-knit community dedicated to meeting the needs of their students. They truly embody the spirit of Maine's greater, tight-knit community. Observing the evolution of Biddeford's shifting demographics over time, it becomes clear why this bill is essential.

Biddeford							
School-Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Students Experiencing Homelessness in Biddeford (ESSA Dashboard)	25 (1%)	50 (2.1%)	59 (2.5%)	44 (1.9%)	55 (2.4)	68 (2.9)	153 (6.4%)

Over time, the number of students experiencing homelessness has grown tremendously, with a significant increase noted between the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. While the district employs the required McKinney-Vento Liaison, the National Center for Homeless Education recommends a reasonable caseload for a liaison to be between 50-100 students. Although liaisons have many roles, including identifying students experiencing homelessness, facilitating enrollment, ensuring access to services, and collecting and reporting data, much of their role also focuses on support, advocacy, training, and awareness. In districts like Biddeford, where the influx of students experiencing homelessness is substantial, advocating for these students and training all staff who work with them cannot be accomplished within the current time constraints. Adjusting the school funding formula to provide an additional 0.50 weight to a school administrative unit's per-pupil count for each student experiencing homelessness and to the base of operating costs would enable districts to invest in necessary training and programming. This would equip staff members with the skills they need to meet the needs of homeless students and others with whom they work. Additionally, these funds could be used to invest in enhanced support services, which might include an additional liaison. Lewiston, as an example, employs two McKinney-Vento Liaisons, but in 23-24, the district reported 374 students experiencing homelessness. It is also important to recognize that in many districts the McKinney Vento Liaison serves many other roles. In Bangor, as an example, the district-McKinney-Vento Liaison, serving 90 homeless students, also serves as an elementary building principal. Many liaisons serve as



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administrators, social workers, and school counselors, etc. (Maine.Gov, 2024)

It is no surprise that students experiencing homelessness must overcome many social-emotional and educational challenges. A 2021 study published in *The Lancet Public Health* examined the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and homelessness. While homelessness itself isn't recognized as an ACE, other ACEs include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, parental incarceration, mental health problems, and substance abuse. The study found that 89.9% of adults experiencing homelessness had experienced at least one ACE, and 53.9% reported experiencing four or more ACEs. Although many educators have attended sessions on trauma-informed practices individually, adding to the funding formula would provide districts with additional resources to expand these training opportunities. This is especially important for support staff who often work with our most vulnerable students. Such funding would benefit not only those experiencing homelessness but also all students who have experienced trauma. (Koh et al., 2021)

As the tables below indicate, the growing number of homeless students in Biddeford reflects a state-wide concern. According to the Department's ESSA Dashboard, the number of students experiencing homelessness in Maine has increased by over 2,100 since 2017. Communities like Lewiston and Saco have shown growth rates that outpace the state's overall rise in homelessness. Later this session, we are likely to see bills addressing the pervasive issue of chronic absenteeism and exploring how we, as a state, can support our students and combat this problem. A 2022 study by the National Center for Homeless Education shows that, nationwide, 37% of students who experienced homelessness were reported as chronically absent. Maine's rates of chronic absenteeism are consistently higher than this national average, highlighting the need for more comprehensive support for these students. (National Center for Homeless Education, 2022)

Our current funding formula acknowledges the need for additional weight for our multilingual learners (a language shift we might consider in our EPS statutes as we move away from the term "English Language Learners") and for our economically disadvantaged students. We believe that recognizing the unique and substantial needs of our growing population of homeless students is a crucial step toward making Maine's funding formula more equitable for the districts who serve these students. Lastly, as written, this bill could impact the school funding formula during the fiscal year, which will create chaos for districts while putting together their budgets based on the January 279s. We recommend, that if passed, this bill take effect in the 26-27 school year to avoid any disruptions to school budgets around the state.

Thank you and I welcome any questions you may have.

State of Maine							
School-Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Students	1,867 (1.1%)	2,005 (1.1%)	1,782 (1%)	1,646 (1%)	2,317 (1.4%)	3,269 (1.9%)	4,028 (2.4%)



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Experiencing Homelessness (ESSA Dashboard)							
Homeless Students Who Were Chronically Absent (ESSA Dashboard)	43.5%	44.6%	44.5%	58.2%	49.3%	44.7%	48.9%
Lewiston							
School-Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Students Experiencing Homelessness (ESSA Dashboard)	155 (2.8%)	169 (3.1%)	119 (2.2%)	105 (2.1%)	96 (1.9%)	253 (5%)	374 (7.1%)
Saco							
School-Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Students Experiencing Homelessness (ESSA Dashboard)	5 (0.2%)	10 (0.4%)	9 (0.3%)	5 (0.2%)	17 (0.6%)	93 (3.4%)	110 (4%)

### Works Cited

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