

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 193

AN ACT TO FUND STUDENTS IN MAINE SCHOOLS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

February 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Robbie Feinberg, the director of communications and government relations for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 193.

Across Maine, more communities are seeing residents unable to find a permanent place to live, and our schools sit on the front lines of addressing this challenge.

During the last school year, more than 4,000 Maine students lacked a fixed place to live each night -- doubled-up with friends or staying in a hotel. Every day, our staff see more students enter class without basic needs: clean clothes, hygiene products, and school supplies.

Our superintendents and school board members are grateful that the legislature has already taken steps to tackle this growing challenge. The recent pilot program sponsored by Sen. Rafferty to provide up to \$750 per student for emergency financial assistance gave our schools a valuable tool to help prevent homelessness. But if we want to provide students with the resources to truly succeed, we know more funding is needed.

One of our schools' primary goals is to provide educational stability to children experiencing homelessness, even if their living situation changes. If a student is forced to move from one town to the next, districts work to help them remain at their current school – a place where they've already made friends and developed relationships with staff. To do this, our districts sometimes transport students an hour or more each way to the school in their former town.

Our school leaders are committed to this work, but it is expensive. One superintendent in central Maine estimates their district spends about \$1,200 per day in dedicated transportation costs for these students. The state does not help to cover these expenses, and only a small amount is covered by the federal government. L.D. 193 would provide meaningful funding to assist our districts with these costs.

Schools across Maine have also developed an array of wraparound services to help our McKinney-Vento students succeed. Educators and social workers help children and families navigate a maze of government bureaucracy to obtain basic social supports, like health insurance and SNAP benefits. And because students

are dealing with so many issues outside of school, they often need targeted academic interventions to help them get to graduation. Districts have added dedicated tutors and other staff to make this happen.

All of this work takes time and resources, but it leads to results. A recent study¹ found that districts that received additional federal funding for homeless students during the pandemic saw improvement in graduation rates, absenteeism rates, and reading and math scores. Unfortunately, much of that expanded pandemic-era funding has come to an end. L.D. 193 recognizes these students' substantial needs and provides schools with the resources to make a meaningful difference. We urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.

¹ <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/arp-hcy-national-outcomes-summary-109427.pdf>