



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Michael Brennan

49 Wellington Road
Portland, ME 04103
Phone: (207) 939-6462
Michael.Brennan@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan presenting

LD 747, An Act to Provide Funds to Reduce Student Homelessness

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland.

Today, I am here to introduce **LD 747, An Act to Provide Funds to Reduce Student Homelessness**.

This bill continues the program and funding approved last year by this committee and Legislature.


At this point, the effort has gotten off to an excellent start and the potential impact is very promising (see report). The need for this program has been further demonstrated by a recent report from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) that showed the high school graduation rate for homeless students was 59%, compared to an overall rate of 86%.

Also, this bill changes the name of the subsidy program for homeless students to the “rental assistance program for homeless students.”

According to the Maine Department of Education, 5,223 students were homeless or experienced some kind of housing insecurity in 2023. This committee knows well the ramifications for unhoused children – from poor health and developmental delays to school instability to increased risk of victimization. This funding is crucial to help the most vulnerable children at the earliest stages possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

MaineHousing awards \$2M to combat student homelessness in 5 school systems

 [pressherald.com/2025/01/15/mainehousing-awards-2m-to-combat-student-homelessness-in-five-school-systems](https://www.pressherald.com/2025/01/15/mainehousing-awards-2m-to-combat-student-homelessness-in-five-school-systems)

January 16, 2025

MaineHousing awarded \$2 million to fund pilot programs aimed at preventing student homelessness in five school systems, including Portland's, the agency announced.

School systems in Portland, Lewiston, Biddeford, Bath and rural Aroostook County will use the money to hire housing and homelessness prevention specialists. The systems can also use the money to provide direct financial relief to keep homeless and students in unstable situations in their homes or to secure new housing, the agency said in a written statement Wednesday.

The pilot program is designed to be flexible “to best meet the needs of the family needing help,” Lauren Bustard, senior director of homeless initiatives at MaineHousing, said in a written statement.

Derek Davis/Portland Press Herald, file

Roughly 1,700 students and their families are expected to benefit from the pilot, the agency said.

Portland received the largest grant of just over \$759,000, which should help an estimated 650 students, the agency said.

Bath got roughly \$442,000 to help 300 students; Aroostook County roughly \$353,000 to help 110 students; Biddeford and York County got \$275,000 to help 200 students; and Lewiston was awarded roughly \$169,000 to help between 400 and 500 students, the agency said.

The awardees were selected from 11 proposals, totaling nearly \$5 million in requested funds, MaineHousing said. The money comes from a one-time source of funding approved by Gov. Janet Mills and the state Legislature.

“Unfortunately, demand for these valuable state resources far outstripped the available funds,” MaineHousing director Dan Brennan said in a written statement. “As with all pilot programs, we look forward to learning all we can – in this case, to better prevent homelessness for students in the future.”



TO: Housing and Economic Development Committee
FROM: Erik C. Jorgensen, Senior Director of Government Relations and Communication

**KKKK-2 STUDENT HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVE
JANUARY 15, 2025, REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE**

BACKGROUND

Part KKKK-2 was an initiative included in the spring 2024 supplemental budget (LD 2214) providing funding in the amount of \$2 million to create a pilot program aimed at reducing homelessness among students and their families. This funding reflected the intent of LD 1422, a bill sponsored by Representative Michael Brennan. The proposed operational concept was to make funding available as grants to school districts seeking to hire housing navigators and provide related services to students and their families.

Language in the budget stated: “The authority shall consider ways in which the services provided by school-based housing navigators established by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act could benefit the administration of a rental subsidy program. The program must provide housing subsidies directly to homeless students or to an adult family member or guardian of the homeless student. In developing the program, the authority shall incorporate elements to provide housing subsidies to homeless students who have not reached 18 years of age who do not have adult family members or guardians to secure housing on their behalf. The authority shall report to the joint standing or joint select committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over housing matters on the progress of the program's development no later than January 15, 2025.”

RULEMAKING

Though it was just \$2 million, this pilot program required rulemaking, which greatly slowed the process of launching the program. This initiative was included as part of MaineHousing's Homeless Solutions Rule. The rulemaking process started at MaineHousing's September Board of Commissioners Meeting; a public hearing took place at their October meeting; and the rule was adopted in November.

A notice of funding availability was initially posted on the MaineHousing website on October 3, and the Maine Department of Education notified districts directly of the available funding.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND GRANT COMPETITION

The program was designed to be delivered as grants to interested school districts. No funding was used by MaineHousing for administration or other purposes. MaineHousing worked directly with representatives from the Maine Department of Education's McKinney-Vento office, as well as Representative Brennan, the original bill sponsor, to design the program. The DOE reached out to schools to make them aware of the program.

The program is centered on districts working with local homeless service hubs. From the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO):

The districts will be funded to hire or contract for a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Navigation Specialist position, who will provide services designed to either assist the student/family in maintaining current housing, or in obtaining new housing that meets their needs. Direct Financial Assistance payments may also be provided to families to cover expenses that will help them maintain their current housing or obtain new housing. This assistance is intended to be flexible to best meet the needs of the family, but due to the short nature of the program, ongoing rental assistance for current or newly established housing must not exceed six months of payments.

In the interest of assuring that these funds reach as many of Maine's McKinney-Vento students as possible, the application process gave priority consideration to Applicants (single SAUs/EUT or collaboratives) that have identified an average of 50 or more homeless students in the past two (2) school years.

SCORING AND ADJUDICATION:

One week prior to the initial application deadline, only two districts had submitted proposals. The decision was made to extend the NOFO, and the DOE enhanced its outreach to districts. By the new deadline, the program had received eleven applications from around the state. Overall, there were four applicants that did not meet threshold and therefore were not scored. Of the seven applicants that were scored, the total funding requested was \$4,987,838, which was \$2,987,000 more than was available.

A proposal review team comprised of representatives from MaineHousing and Maine Department of Education met to review proposals at MaineHousing's offices on January 9, 2025.

After scoring, the review team fully funded the top three proposals and partially funded the fourth and fifth applications, both because parts of those proposals were broader than the scope of the NOFA, and because the total funding available was only \$2million.

The final two applicants that were scored were not funded. Please see a summary of the five scored applicants and their recommended funding below:

Applicant	Town/Area	# Expected to Serve	Notes	Award Amount
Biddeford	Biddeford/York County	200 Students (125 HHs)	Includes RSU23, RSU57, Saco, Sanford, Dayton, Partnering with: YCCAC, YCSP	\$ 275,000.00
Lewiston	Lewiston	400-500 Students	Partnering with Community Concepts	169,882.70
MSAD70	Rural Aroostook	110 Students	Includes MSAD20, MSAD50, MSAD45, SAD1, RSU29 and Caribou	353,232.69
Portland	Portland	650 Students (400 HHs)	Partnering with QHC	759,670.43
RSU1	Bath/surrounding area	300 Students	MSAD75 (Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, Topsham, Harpswell), Brunswick and Richmond	442,214.18
TOTAL				\$ 2,000,000.00

TIMELINE:

This work is expected to start immediately. MaineHousing has developed contracts for these projects and normally sends payment to grantees within two weeks of receiving a signed contract.