

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 384

AN ACT TO PREVENT STUDENT HOMELESSNESS

March 19, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Eileen King, the deputy executive director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Superintendents Association and the Maine School Boards Association in support of L.D. 384.

The original pilot program offering up to \$750 for McKinney-Vento students has been transformational for school districts throughout our state, and we strongly urge your committee to maintain that funding moving forward.

Districts have described this program as a lifeline for families that has provided crucial, timely resources to local families to keep them out of homelessness. As just a few examples: this program has paid for utility bills, heating oil, and family transportation. Schools have provided assistance to families living in U-Hauls, getting them assistance to help them get out of that situation and into safer, warmer quarters.

Before this pilot program went into effect, a few school districts were using limited philanthropy dollars to provide these resources to families. But the implementation of Sen. Rafferty's original legislation expanded this work statewide. Schools in smaller and less wealthy districts suddenly had more resources to assist students and families in need. This pilot program has reinforced the value of Maine schools as true pillars of our local communities, and extending this program will ensure that our schools can maintain that role.

The consideration of L.D. 384 also comes at a crucial time for students in our state. The number of homeless students in Maine has climbed significantly. Social services are limited. Our associations are also concerned about potential cuts in federal funding that could affect vulnerable students. Having this program as a safety net will provide an effective tool to continue serving students and families.

The only concern that some districts expressed was the formula used to allocate funding to districts. This formula provided \$750 per student in certain school districts, but in others, the amount was less than half that. Here is how the funding broke down, based on a release from the Department of Education:

Based on the formula created, every SAU with schools has, at a minimum, \$750 available should a need arise. SAUs were divided into three tiers based on the number of McKinney-Vento students identified in the 2022-23 school year. SAUs with over 50 McKinney-Vento students are in Tier I and will receive an allocation of \$312/per McKinney-Vento student identified. SAUs with between 3 and 49 McKinney-Vento students will receive an allocation of \$344/per McKinney-Vento student identified. SAUs with 0-2 McKinney-Vento students identified will receive an allocation of \$750 per SAU.

Our members would encourage your committee to ensure that this funding is distributed equitably to every district. Districts have also noted that the cost of rent, energy, groceries and more have all only climbed since this program started, and the \$750 figure may no longer be enough, in many cases.

You frequently hear our associations oppose bills that might require more costs or effort on our districts and educators. But in the case of L.D. 384, we fully support this initiative. While the fiscal note may be substantial, our members believe it will directly help more Maine students and families in this time of need.

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