



Before the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, April 26, 2021
Testimony of Patricia Julianelle, SchoolHouse Connection
In Support of LD 1318:
An Act to Increase High School Graduation Rates for Students Experiencing
Educational Disruption

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1318. I am the Senior Strategist for Program Advancement and Legal Affairs at SchoolHouse Connection, a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education. It has been my privilege to work with a coalition of youth service providers, school district homeless liaisons, advocates, and young people across the state of Maine. We listened to youth describe the barriers they face as they try to exit homelessness permanently, and we worked together to devise policy solutions to eliminate those barriers. LD 1318 is one such solution.

Maine's public schools identified 2,552 homeless students in the 2018-19 school year. Education is the key to overcoming their homelessness: Lack of a high school degree is the number one risk factor for young adult homelessness.¹ Youth without a high school diploma or GED are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness as young adults.

LD 1318 contains simple provisions that have proven successful in other states to help homeless youth graduate from high school. States like Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Kentucky, California, Texas, Oregon, and Washington have laws that streamline and facilitate access to state diplomas for students experiencing homelessness; exempt students from district-specific graduation requirements when they get off track due to changing schools in high school; and streamline the award and accrual of partial credits.

While many schools implement such practices voluntarily, the mobility of students experiencing homelessness and other educational disruptions makes it critical that policies are consistent from school to school and district to district. State laws like LD 1318 are working well to help students achieve the diploma they need to obtain stable employment, enter higher education, and end their homelessness.

These laws also recognize the profound impact homelessness has on a student’s ability to progress toward graduation. The high mobility, trauma, hunger, and other effects of homelessness mean that for some students, an adjusted or alternative diploma may be their only path to graduation. These students have worked hard and progressed toward graduation, but homelessness has erected a barrier that can keep them from crossing the stage and receiving their diploma. LD 1318 provides appropriate flexibility for students, schools, and the Department of Education to maximize high school graduation while ensuring students meet the necessary requirements and proficiencies to be ready for the workforce and for post-secondary education.

LD 1318 also will help keep Maine in compliance with federal law. LD 1318 will improve implementation of several requirements of the federal McKinney-Vento Act, including that states have “procedures that ensure that... [homeless] youths ... are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including by identifying and removing barriers that prevent youths described in this clause from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies.” 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(F)(ii).

Finally, the Every Student Succeeds Act requires disaggregation of graduation data for homeless and foster students. These students’ graduation rates are now a national issue. LD 1318 will put Maine ahead of the game in raising homeless and foster students’ graduation rates, so state data will show gradual improvements. These improvements translate into real benefits for students, who can progress to post-secondary education and/or gainful employment. They also translate into benefits for the state: Increasing Maine’s graduation rate just 2.5% would generate \$2.9 million in spending, \$6.7 million in home sales, \$330,000 in state and local tax revenue, and \$1.3 million savings on health care.ⁱⁱ

I urge you to support LD 1318, to help break the cycle of homelessness by providing homeless youth with the education and support that leads to stable employment and housing.

Patricia Julianelle
Senior Strategist for Program Advancement and Legal Affairs
patricia@schoolhouseconnection.org
(202) 905-6690

ⁱ Chapin Hall (2017). *Missed Opportunities*.

ⁱⁱ <http://graduationeffect.org/>.