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Testimony Presenting LD 1318, “An Act To Increase High School Graduation Rates for Students Experiencing Education Disruption.”

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Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee; I am Nate Libby, I proudly represent all of the people of Lewiston in the Maine Senate. I'm here to present LD 1318, "An Act To Increase High School Graduation Rates for Students Experiencing Education Disruption."

Returning members of the committee may recall that last year I introduced a similar bill with a different title. Unfortunately, like a lot of the bills introduced last year, the bill ultimately died when the Legislature adjourned prematurely as a result of COVID-19. However, this also gave me time to rework this bill to find more inclusive solutions for young kids who experience education disruption in various forms.

The original idea for this bill was brought to me by the folks at New Beginnings who see every day the barriers and educational disruptions that homeless youth and youth in foster care experience as they try to finish high school. In 2018, the overall high school graduation rate in Maine was 86.8 percent, for youth experiencing homelessness, it was 57.7 percent and for youth in foster care, it was only 56 percent.¹ Clearly, we have work to do. While they are much more experienced than I in the content area of this bill, it was obvious to me from the start that this is a necessary and important update that we need to make to existing statute so that more of Maine's youth can be successful in completing high school and being set up for the rest of their lives with the strongest foundation possible.

As currently drafted, LD 1318 creates a pathway for youth to get a state school diploma rather than a school-specific diploma. You'll hear from the Department of Education about other pathways to achieve the goal of diploma attainment, and I'm hopeful that all stakeholders in this effort can come together soon to find the best legislative path forward to accomplish this common goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I hope the Committee will support this bill and I am happy to take any questions.

¹ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10121-state-high-school-graduation-rates-by-priority-populations#detailed/2/any/false/1729,871,870,573,37/any/19546>