

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of LD 1769: An Act Concerning Students Who Experience Educational Disruption due to Temporary or Permanent Changes Where They Live. My name is Denise Hamlin, I am the Licensed Clinical Social Worker at RSU 39 in Caribou Maine. I have served many students in relation to educational disruption and homelessness for over 23 years. Each year the district works hard on improving the lives of approximately 1200 students and families as we attempt to connect with shelters, reach out for crisis services, counseling, and outreach services.

I am in Favor of LD 1769:

Many youths in our school district struggle with educational disruption due to homelessness, housing instability and mental health crises. Residing in Aroostook County has some limitations, public transportation is minimal, housing is limited and we experience difficulty accessing residential/hospital treatment facilities for those experiencing mental health crisis. Many of our students are referred to the southern part of the state for inpatient treatment. Students and families often lack the continuity of care. Many of these students experience educational disruption and they face multiple barriers to remaining invested in their education. Upon return to the community, it creates more stress and it is difficult to identify key external supports. As a school district, we are not always informed when a student is returning to our area. They show up on our doorstep with no plan, struggling to reintegrate and fall behind academically. With LD 1769 it would enable the school staff to help families connect with supports without spending hours attempting to figure out who the correct contact is and increase collaboration to aid families during this stressful time. The end result is that more students will have access to services and learning opportunities to be successful.

LD1769 has the ability to assist a consistent communication structure that allows schools to collaborate, access existing resources and provide consistent support to students and families. They will have the knowledge to develop a transition plan and be able to focus on addressing the issues that may have attributed to the crisis. When students return to the same environment that created the issues, it sets them up for future difficulties. Planning and removing barriers are a must and is the key to prevention. This was a successful program in the past and was eliminated during the last administration. I found it less difficult to make contact with providers when I was aware of who the liaison was. With one staff member managing the liaison network, they have the ability to provide professional development and opportunities for regional network meetings and collaboration. This ensures a more effective way to work together, have seamless transitions and better outcome for students. A local liaison who has the skills and capacity to carry out the position is key to ensuring that all children and youth receive all protections and services necessary for them to succeed.

For these reasons, I ask you to vote yes on LD 1769, to support our youth and our state. It is time to support the future of Maine! Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and your commitment to Maine's children.

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