



LD 1422: An Act to End Homelessness and Assist Students Who Are Homeless by Establishing a Housing Voucher Program and Providing Site-based Housing Services.

April 14, 2023

Dear Senator Pierce, Rep. Gere, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Housing:

My name is Osgood, I use they/them pronouns, and I am the Executive Director of Portland Outright, which has been representing and advocating for Maine's LGBTQ+ youth since 1988. I am testifying today on behalf of **Portland Outright** and **Equality Maine** in support of LD 1422: An Act to End Homelessness and Assist Students Who Are Homeless by Establishing a Housing Voucher Program and Providing Site-based Housing Services.

At both organizations, our mission is an urgent response to the dire conditions in Maine and the United States for people of color and gender non-conforming queer people, who face discriminatory violence and persecution at disproportionate rates and are also systematically denied access to adequate housing and healthcare. LGBTQ+ young people continue to make up 40% of the homeless youth population, despite making up less than 10% of the US youth population generally.¹ This bill would improve conditions for LGBTQ+ young people navigating homelessness due to their life circumstances, including lack of family support and economic insecurity. Housing justice is inextricable from LGBTQ+ equity and we are proud to support this bill.

Those of us in LGBTQ+ spaces know first hand that access to safe, secure housing is a lifeline for people of all ages, particularly for young people. The research also shows that LGBTQ+ youth who have at least one supportive, accepting adult are 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year.² Stable housing is vital to maintaining participation in educational spaces and relationships with the supportive adults in those spaces, such as teachers, school counselors, and coaches. This voucher program has additional benefits for our youth and communities, as lack of safe housing and access to services directly causes the stress, unsafe conditions, and impossible choices that lead to poor mental and physical health outcomes, as well as interactions with the juvenile justice system. Put simply, the streets and shelters are not places to grow up.

Here in Portland and across the state, we are in a housing crisis. A lack of affordable housing and the economic hardships many Maine families endured during the COVID-19 pandemic means more young

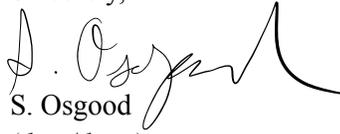
¹ *LGBTQ Young Adults Experience Homelessness at More than Twice the Rate of Peers*. Chapin Hall at University of Chicago, 2018.

² *The Trevor Project Research Brief: Accepting Adults Reduce Suicide Attempts Among LGBTQ Youth*, Trevor Project, 2019.

people are trying to stay in school while worrying about where they will sleep at night. These vouchers would be a lifesaving intervention for students navigating unstable housing.

We urge you to pass LD1422 and to communicate to our state's young people that their communities and their state care about them. During this pivotal developmental time in those young people's lives, we hope to count you as one of the supportive adults on their team.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Osgood', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

S. Osgood
(they/them)

On behalf of:
Portland Outright
EqualityMaine

S. Osgood
Portland Outright
LD 1422

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