



April 20, 2023

To the Hon. Chair and Members of the Standing Committee on Housing,

I am Meg Parkhurst, Assistant Superintendent of the Saco School Department. I am submitting this testimony in favor of LD 1609, An Act to Prevent Student Homelessness.

Over the past five years, we have seen an 800% increase in the number of McKinney-Vento-eligible students in our district. These students lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Homelessness is a growing problem that has a direct impact on the education and well-being of our students. Much of this homelessness is owing to skyrocketing rents and a red-hot housing market. Still, another contributor to this startling figure is a population of New Mainers currently resting their head in substandard housing.

Indeed, the Saco Schools serve nearly 100 asylees and asylum-seekers who have come to us from neighboring communities like South Portland and Freeport. We welcome these new neighbors and thank Catholic Charities of Maine for helping us serve them. However, this sudden influx of students has put a strain on our resources and we lack critical resources to fully meet the needs of our homeless families and youth.

The funding and approved uses proposed in LD 1609 would have a measurable impact on the quality of life and education of the students we are so honored to serve. This act would provide additional resources to support the educational needs of homeless students, including transportation, tutoring, and other wrap-around services that are critical for academic success.

This act would also create a Homeless Youth Fund to support housing stability and prevent homelessness among youth. This is a critical step forward in addressing the growing problem of student homelessness in Maine. It would enable us to provide more support to our most vulnerable students and ensure they have the resources they need to succeed.

We urge you to support LD 1609 and help us provide a better future for our students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Parkhurst". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Meg Parkhurst
Assistant Superintendent Saco Schools