

April 20, 2023

Dear members of the Standing Committee on Housing:

I am writing to offer testimony in support of LD 1609, An Act to Prevent Student Homelessness.

As Superintendent of the Biddeford School Department, my staff and I have seen firsthand the devastating effects of homelessness on students and their families. Especially since the pandemic, schools have become front line social service agencies, and our daily tasks have expanded beyond traditional education to include providing essential social services to students and families.

The pandemic, rising inflation, and an affordable housing crisis that is acutely felt in York County has caused many families to experience financial hardship, job loss, and eviction, which have resulted in a significant increase in homelessness. The Biddeford School Department has served more than 100 homeless families this year, and we are currently addressing more than 60 active cases. Families are doubled up, living in tents, and staying in the back of U-Hauls. We have provided these families with emergency housing, case management, gasoline, and utilities, among other essential services with CARES Act and ARP funds. However, our school department's budget allocation is insufficient to cover the costs of serving homeless families, and we often lack the allowable expenditures to provide families in crisis what they need.

Homelessness has a devastating effect on students' academic achievement, emotional well-being, and overall health. Homeless students often face myriad challenges, including hunger, inadequate shelter, lack of transportation, and limited access to medical care. These challenges make it difficult for students to focus on their education and succeed in school, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

LD 1609 would provide critical support for homeless students and their families, including rental assistance, case management, and transportation assistance. By preventing student homelessness, this legislation would help students stay in school, receive the support they need to succeed academically, and break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

The Biddeford School Committee, our 500 employees and I urge you to support LD 1609 and take action to prevent student homelessness in Maine. The Biddeford School Department believes that all students deserve the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their housing status, and this legislation is a critical step in ensuring that every student has the support they need to thrive.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Ray  
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs