

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Anna Brewer, and I am the Homeless Voices for Justice Team Leader at Preble Street. I am here today to testify on behalf of Preble Street in support of the amended version of LD 773, which would provide essential housing support for students experiencing homelessness in Maine.

Preble Street is a human services organization that operates programs throughout the state of Maine. We provide low-barrier services that empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and we advocate for solutions to these problems.

Preble Street's Teen Services programs offer a full spectrum of care for homeless and runaway youth between the ages of 12-21. Our program offerings include a drop-in teen center, a 24-bed licensed youth shelter (the largest in the state), a street outreach program, and a transitional living housing program. Teen Services empowers youth to plan healthy, hopeful futures by connecting them to basic needs, supportive services such as education and counseling, case management, and housing. Teen Services provides 24/7 year-round safety and support to over 200 youth and young adults each year and in 2020, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, supported 45 youth in securing permanent or supportive housing.

We see first-hand, on a daily basis, the challenges that youth experiencing homelessness face in obtaining housing. Housing assistance programs can be incredibly hard to access for youth and families experiencing homelessness. One, because these programs are underfunded and unable to meet the immense need, and two, because these students and families are balancing an incredible number of stressors and needs while experiencing homelessness.

At Preble Street, we have strong supports in place to assist the young people who stay in our shelter with getting their education. However, homelessness creates an inherent lack of stability that is necessary for academic success. This leads to a cycle that continues to repeat. We know that youth with less than a high school diploma or GED **have a 346% higher risk** of experiencing homelessness than youth with at least a high school degree. In other words, students who start their educational careers as homeless or unstably housed are more likely to be unstably housed or homeless as an adult because of the impact of their childhood homelessness on their educational journey. This is unacceptable and entirely preventable.

McKinney-Vento liaisons are a key link to housing supports for homeless youth. As our Director of Teen Services attests, "McKinney-Vento liaisons in this state are nothing

short of superheroes who work tirelessly to support students experiencing homelessness in their districts. But we see every day that these supports are simply not enough. Students and their families *need housing* in order to be successful.”

LD 773 and this proposed Homeless Student Assistance Program and Homeless Student Assistance Fund would provide essential support to homeless youth, connecting them to the housing that they need to complete their education and build the foundation for successful adulthood. This bill will make an enormous difference for homeless students in Maine. I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on this legislation.

Thank you.