



SCHOOLHOUSE CONNECTION SUPPORTS H. 717

January 31, 2024

Representative Peter Conlon, Chair
House Committee on Education
Vermont General Assembly

Thank you Chair. Conlon, Vice Chair Brady and Distinguished Members of the Committee for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Rodd Monts and I am director of state policy for SchoolHouse Connection. SchoolHouse is a nonpartisan, national nonprofit that advocates for students experiencing homelessness and their families.

SchoolHouse has helped pass laws in 24 states across the U.S. to improve access for young people to the safe and appropriate shelter, care, and supportive services they need to succeed pre-K through higher ed so that they ultimately thrive as adults.

I am joined today by some great higher education professionals who will share their expertise relative to designated homeless liaisons and the impact that this type of legislation has on improving outcomes for the students they work with.

My comments will be brief so that you can hear from them.

I do want to share that SHC supports H. 717 because we believe it will create a system of support for youth experiencing homelessness and former foster youth across Vermont so that they can better access – and navigate through – post-secondary education.

I watched recent testimony from the Vermont Agency on Education about higher ed liaisons providing a crucial bridge from high school to post-secondary education for students experiencing homelessness – many of whom have been supported through K-12 by dedicated McKinney-Vento liaisons.

I also watched testimony from the higher education community about the great work that they do to identify and support students experiencing homelessness on their campuses. I believe one of them also used the bridge metaphor. And you will probably hear it again in



testimony today, along with an explanation of why having a designated, sustainable bridge is so critical.

Recognizing that homeless students lose the support of McKinney-Vento liaisons once they leave high school, state and federal policymakers have worked in bipartisan fashion to push for designated higher ed liaisons in recent years.

Nine states have laws designating homeless liaisons in post-secondary institutions. ([AR](#), [FL](#), [ME](#), [LA](#), [TN](#), [IL](#), [MD](#), [NV](#), [CA](#)). And at the federal level, we expect reintroduction of the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act later this year. ([HR 6666 of 2022](#) was sponsored by Rep. Katherine Clark, D-MA)

Additionally, more than [a dozen states across the](#) U.S. have passed laws to provide students experiencing homelessness and former foster youth . with supports like:

- Priority enrollment in post-secondary institutions
- Priority in on-campus housing (including during breaks),
- Priority in on-campus employment¹, and
- Fee waivers for registration, tuition, labs and other expenses.

H. 717 checks many of these boxes and if passed, the bill would be one of the strongest pieces of higher education legislation for homeless and former foster youth in the nation.

The committee has an opportunity to do something substantial here so I urge you to support this bill!

Joining me today are:

Becca Smitty
Director, MT One Stop
Middle Tennessee State University

Ana Ramos

¹ SchoolHouse Connection (2022). [State Laws Supporting College Students Experiencing Homelessness](#).



Program Director
Fostering Panther Pride
Florida International University

Dr. Brandy Gros
Homeless Higher Education Consultant
(Speaking to work on the state law in Louisiana)

Haskett, M., Buccelli, A., Renbarger, R. (2023). "Higher Education Liaisons for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Role Preparation and Professional Development Needs." *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, Vol. 52, N1. Center for Economic Education, University of Louisville.