

TESTIMONY REGARDING

L.D. 1682

AN ACT TO CREATE THE MAINE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Superintendents Association and the Maine School Boards Association. MSSA is neither for nor against this proposal, while MSBA is testifying in support of L.D. 1682.

While the positions on the L.D. may be different, the support for the project and the enthusiasm for the idea of this opportunity for learning is the same.

MSSA and MSBA think the opportunities for this type of learning for students in grades preK-grade 12 should be available for all students in Maine. Superintendents spoke of opportunities their staff and students already participate in and were very supportive of all students being engaged in this experiential education program. School board members echoed these comments.

We support the intent of the bill, as outlined below:

2. Purposes. The program shall:

A. Develop and manage a grant program to help public schools and school administrative units create staff positions that support:

- (1) The learning and academic development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to provide experiential hands-on learning;
- (2) The health and physical development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to help students build connections between the food that they and their communities produce and the food that they prepare and eat; and
- (3) The emotional and behavioral development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to build, expand and maintain school gardens and other experiential learning spaces; and

B. Provide ongoing support to public school educators engaged in hands-on experiential education initiatives for continued education and professional development opportunities.

Questions that were raised during the discussions included:

The projected fiscal note must be quite high for this to occur and specific funding sources are not entirely clear. With this coming out of the General Fund, what priorities need to be made to fund this project and not something else, as equally important?

A second concern was the eventual shift of the cost of the program from being state funded to a cost that would need to be picked up by the local district. The question arose “would some districts not seek to become involved in the early stages if they knew it would be difficult if not impossible to continue should local funds not be able to maintain this experience for future groups of students?”