



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 88
Belfast, ME 04915
Phone: (207) 761-5616
www.sierraclub.org/maine

To: Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Nathan Davis, Ph.D., Sierra Club Maine
Date: May 2, 2023
Re: **Testimony in Opposition to L.D. 618: An Act to Eliminate Critical Race Theory, Social and Emotional Learning and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from School Curricula**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Nathan Davis, and I write on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. Sierra Club's Environmental Justice Policy requires, among other things, that we "discuss and explore the linkages between environmental quality and social justice, and [...] promote dialogue, increased understanding and appropriate action."¹ To that end, we urge you to vote "ought not to pass" on L.D 618: An Act to Eliminate Critical Race Theory, Social and Emotional Learning and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from School Curricula.

This bill consists mostly of incorrect definitions. Leaving aside for the moment the complexity of defining "critical race theory" - which has been a subject of academic debate since long before it became a *bête noire* of aspiring Presidents, and which is not taught in any K-12 school in Maine - we don't believe that any practitioner of social and emotional learning in Maine would recognize their job in any of the parts of the proposed seven-part definition. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning defines "social and emotional learning" as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions".² A large meta-analysis of "213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students" published in the journal *Child Development* in 2011 found that "[social and emotional learning] participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement".³ More generally, we hope that an educational environment that cultivates empathy, supportive relationships, and responsible and caring decisions would be a universal goal.

We are similarly baffled by LD 618's mention of "diversity, equity, and inclusion," which again does not align with any parts of the seven-part definition under it. Even the US Chamber of Commerce dedicates a significant portion of its website to promoting its and others' diversity, equity, and

¹ <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/environmental-justice>

² <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21291449/>

inclusion efforts and declares that “diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a business imperative”.⁴ Perhaps the proponents of LD 618 do not realize that it would be bad for business.

Finally, regarding LD 618’s laudatory mention of meritocracy, it might be instructive to consider that the word “meritocracy” was popularized in 1958 by author Michael Young as a term of derision in his satirical novel “The Rise of the Meritocracy,”⁵ and that unthinking use of the word rather emphasizes his criticisms of an imagined future in which the lower classes are relegated to lifetimes of menial labor due to their supposed natural inferiority.

We encourage you to vote “ought not to pass” on L.D. 618. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Nathan Davis, Ph.D.
Sierra Club Maine
Legislative Team member

⁴ <https://www.uschamber.com/diversity>

⁵ <https://www.goodreads.com/it/book/show/792606>