

Mikayla Gullace
Schoodic Institute
LD 1817

Hello Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the distinguished Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Mikayla Gullace and I live in the town of Winter Harbor and work as an environmental educator with Schoodic Institute and the National Park Service. I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1817.

At the Schoodic Institute, we host an outdoor education program, called Schoodic Education Adventure (SEA), where middle school students spend 3 days and 2 nights in Acadia National Park. The typical day at SEA starts when those big yellow school buses pull up outside of Eliot Hall. Excited (and sometimes nervous!) kids pile out, suitcases in hand, and sprint toward the bunkhouse to pick out their beds. Once settled into their home for the next few days, students are guided through some basic Leave No Trace principles to ensure everyone shows respect to the land, the organisms that inhabit it, and the people that rely on it. We then might split into groups, with some students getting to check out our large floor map of Maine and the surrounding waters while others participate in a scavenger hunt activity involving the use of compasses, which is often a new skill for many students. When lunchtime finally arrives, the classes make their way over to our dining hall, where Schoodic Institute's kitchen staff has prepared a delicious meal served with a side of some "bussin' juice," as one kid stated in their thank you note reflecting on the week. Lunchtime then segways into our afternoon program, which, if the tides are right, may involve participation in a citizen science project assessing invasive crab populations.

Students might use a dichotomous key (and hopefully learn that not all coniferous trees are pines!), face their fear of crab claws, gape in awe while imagining what Acadia looked like during the last ice age, compare their own senses to the unique adaptations of nocturnal animals, and, most importantly, form closer relationships with their classmates. There's usually some rambunctious shouts during free time at the basketball courts, lots of singing and riddles over evening s'mores, and more than a few tired faces the following morning as students share their amusing stories from the bunkhouse.

A day at SEA is a chance for students to take their learning into different outdoor environments, push themselves out of their comfort zones and routines, and communicate with classmates and educators they normally might not interact with. SEA is also a place where students with varying learning styles can come forth and shine, allowing their teachers and peers to view them in a new light. And lastly, it's a time for NPS and Schoodic Educators to share their love of the outdoors while embracing the true magic of the Schoodic Peninsula. Bringing this amazing experience to students and educators is incredibly important, and making these experiences more accessible through the passing of this bill is crucial.

For these reasons, I would ask you to support LD 1818 and vote to pass on this bill. Thank you to the sponsor for bringing forward this bill and thank you to the committee members for your work on this Committee.