



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
From: Nathan Davis, Ph.D., Sierra Club Maine
Date: May 8, 2023
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 1817: An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, 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. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote "ought to pass" on L.D 1817: An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.

The Sierra Club's mission statement is: "To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; To educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives." We literally can't think of a better way to pursue this mission than to provide students with an opportunity for immersive outdoor education. L.D. 1817 is a thoughtful and balanced way to achieve this and appropriately addresses issues of access and equity; scientific, humanistic, and civic education; and social and emotional learning.

The benefits of outdoor education are well-supported by research. A large meta-analysis of 147 studies published in *Frontiers in Public Health* in 2022 concluded in part that "nature-specific outdoor learning has measurable socio-emotional, academic and wellbeing benefits, and should be incorporated into every child's school experience with reference to their local context."¹

More generally, we feel, as do so many others, that our collective alienation from nature is near the root of our alienation from each other. Those of us who are fortunate to be able to spend a few days in the woods or at sea know that such experiences can be not just restorative but transformative, and can change what we value about our lives and the world. My childhood experiences in the White Mountains of my native New Hampshire constitute some of my most vivid early memories. But the primary value of these experiences lies not in the lucidity of their memory but in what they taught me: that with a pair of boots and a bit of grit (and possibly some snacks), the shadowy obscurities of the human world can open into sunlight and clarity, and that in that clarity, you can distinguish what is fleeting from what endures.

¹ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.877058/full>

We encourage you to vote “ought to pass” on L.D. 1817. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nathan Davis, Ph.D.

Sierra Club Maine

Legislative Team member