

Statement of Support to LD 1817

An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All

Maine Students Program

May 10, 2023

Hello, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the distinguished Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Ashley Medina. I am a resident of Lewiston, a mother of two, and I serve as Ward 5's Representative on the Lewiston School Committee. I am submitting my testimony *in support of LD 1817*.

What is there not to support about this great and important bill? When I read that only 25 percent of Maine students are able to access outdoor education, I thought about how many students are missing out on the benefits that come from outdoor education and nature connection. Studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, learn problem-solving skills, gain empathy towards others, and much more! Outdoor education also enhances cognitive development by providing students with hands-on learning experiences. Studies have also shown that students who participate in outdoor learning activities tend to perform better academically. I also believe that Teacher and student relationships can benefit from this experience because it allows them to see each other in a new light and allows them to build trust and stronger relationships.

I also know this all to be true because I was one of those kids that benefited from outdoor learning. As a youth, I grew up in poverty and didn't get to explore nature often. I remember in 5th grade, I was given a scholarship to attend Hebron Academy's Summer Camp. It is an experience that I will always remember and that I will forever be grateful for. I will never forget the first time that I went hiking. I remember the scent of nature and taking in all the different colors of all the beautiful plants, trees and flowers around me. I remember enjoying the sounds of the birds chirping and singing. I remember listening to the water flowing in the nearby streams. I remember the warmth of the sun on my face and most importantly, I remember feeling calm. Calm wasn't a feeling I was too familiar with back then. I had a lot going on in my young mind and I had a lot going on at home. Being outside felt peaceful to me and I felt free. I love nature and the feelings it gave me back then is still true for me 'till this day! I also remember how fun it was to learn about all of the different trees, animals, plants, minerals and insects **in real time**. It caught my attention, and I retained the information in a way that I couldn't by just looking at pictures or watching a video in class.

Overall, I believe that outdoor education is important and that it is a great educational tool that provides numerous benefits for our students. It is important to remember that all students are different and have different learning styles. For some students, this is truly life changing. ***I encourage you to please vote in favor of this bill.*** Our students deserve it!!!! Thank you for your time.

Best,

Ashley Medina