



Natural Resources Council of Maine
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**Testimony in Support of LD 1817,
*An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine
Students Program***

May 10, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Melanie Sturm, the Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1817.

LD 1817 would ensure that every middle school student in Maine has the chance to get outside at one of Maine's outdoor learning centers. The bill would establish the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program to provide immersive outdoor learning experiences for all Maine students in grades 4 through 8. The program would be administered by The University of Maine Cooperative Extension in partnership with outdoor education programs.

NRCM strongly believes everyone should have access to the outdoors because of the many benefits of being outside and learning in nature. However, not everyone today has access to the outdoors due to differences in economics, school resources, race, geography, and other factors. While Maine is known for its land, water, and wildlife and we are fortunate to have trails through the state, some youth face barriers to getting outside. LD 1817 would help address that issue. There are myriad benefits to health and well-being of being outdoors, and fostering a love of place at a young age can cultivate a stewardship ethic and environmental values that last a lifetime. When you love something, you want to protect it. LD 1817 provides an opportunity to invest in our children and the future of the state.

We respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1817. Thank you for your time and consideration.