



Testimony before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Agricultural, Conservation and Forestry Committee

Neither for Nor Against of LD 258

An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

May 16, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.

I am Drew Dumsch and I am a resident of Saco, Maine and President & CEO of The Ecology School, a nonprofit outdoor school and environmental living and learning center located at the historic 105-acre River Bend Farm in Saco. I am also one of the founding members of the Maine Outdoor School for All Network, a state-wide collaboration of experiential learning centers that for the past 14 years has offered multi-day overnight programs and funding for thousands of students and classroom teachers throughout Maine.

I am submitting testimony on behalf of the network neither for nor against LD 258, the Governor's proposed fiscal year 2024-2025 biennial budget bill.

My colleague, Keith Crowley from Chewonki testified before you all on February 28th about our effort and I have attached his testimony to mine which has been uploaded to the legislative website. I want to give you a brief recap of that testimony before providing information about all the success of this effort.

Right now less than 25 percent of middle school students in Maine get access to outdoor education at outdoor schools and [LD 1817](#) - An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program - would fund a three day, two night immersive outdoor education for all Maine students. An outdoor school program is a multi-day, hands-on

field trip that combines team building, environmental science, and nature-based education so that students can learn and develop a life -long appreciation of Maine's incredible outdoor heritage.

Washington and Oregon have already passed similar efforts and have already had tremendous success with engaging their students' education success; supporting teachers by helping to build strong relationships with students; and stimulating the workforce by offering more jobs at outdoor centers right now and encouraging our current students to enter into fields that support our outdoor heritage. and supporting increased achievement and comprehension in math and science; improved testing scores and attendance; motivation to learn.

We are so thankful to Senator Brenner for being the sponsor of this effort and nicknaming this the "feel good bill of the session" and to Representative Carlow for being the lead cosponsor and to the 112 other cosponsors. You read that right, 112 cosponsors which include every single Senator. I won't read off all the names but I have included them in my written testimony so you can see the depth of the list and the ability that this effort has to bring people together.

Presented by Senator BRENNER of Cumberland.

Cosponsored by Representative CARLOW of Buxton and

Senators: BAILEY of York, BALDACCI of Penobscot, BEEBE-CENTER of Knox, BENNETT of Oxford, BLACK of Franklin, BRAKEY of Androscoggin, CARNEY of Cumberland, CHIPMAN of Cumberland, CURRY of Waldo, DAUGHTRY of Cumberland, DUSON of Cumberland, FARRIN of Somerset, GROHOSKI of Hancock, GUERIN of Penobscot, HARRINGTON of York, HICKMAN of Kennebec, INGWERSEN of York, President JACKSON of Aroostook, KEIM of Oxford, LaFOUNTAIN of Kennebec, LAWRENCE of York, LIBBY of Cumberland, LYFORD of Penobscot, MOORE of Washington, NANGLE of Cumberland, PIERCE of Cumberland, POULIOT of Kennebec, RAFFERTY of York, RENY of Lincoln, ROTUNDO of Androscoggin, STEWART of Aroostook, TIMBERLAKE of Androscoggin, TIPPING of Penobscot, VITELLI of Sagadahoc, Representatives: ABDI of Lewiston, ANKELES of Brunswick, ARFORD of Brunswick, BELL of Yarmouth, BLIER of Buxton, BOYER of Poland, BOYLE of Gorham, BRENNAN of Portland, BRIDGEO of Augusta, CAMPBELL of Orrington, CLOUTIER of Lewiston, CLUCHEY of Bowdoinham, COLLINGS of Portland, COPELAND of Saco, CRAFTS of Newcastle, CRAVEN of Lewiston, CROCKETT of Portland, DANA of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, DAVIS of East Machias, DHALAC of South Portland, DODGE of Belfast, DOUDERA of Camden, DUCHARME of Madison, FAULKINGHAM of Winter Harbor, FAY of Raymond, GATTINE of Westbrook, GEIGER of Rockland, GERE of Kennebunkport, GOLEK of Harpswell, GRAMLICH of Old Orchard Beach, HASENFUS of Readfield, HEPLER of Woolwich, HOBBS of Wells, HYMES of Waldo, JAUCH of Topsham, LANDRY of Farmington, LOOKNER of Portland, MADIGAN of Waterville, MALON of Biddeford, MASTRACCIO of Sanford, MATHIESON of Kittery, MATLACK of St. George, MEYER of Eliot, MILLETT of Cape Elizabeth, MILLIKEN of Blue Hill, MONTELL of Gardiner, MOONEN of Portland, MORRIS of Turner, MURPHY of Scarborough, OSHER of Orono, PERRY of Calais, PLUECKER of Warren, POLEWARCZYK of Wiscasset, PRINGLE of Windham, RANA of Bangor, RIELLY of Westbrook, ROEDER of Bangor, SALISBURY of Westbrook, SAMPSON of Alfred, SARGENT of York, SAYRE of

Kennebunk, SCHMERSAL- BURGESS of Mexico, SHAGOURY of Hallowell, SKOLD of Portland, SOBOLESKI of Phillips, STOVER of Boothbay, SUPICA of Bangor, Speaker TALBOT ROSS of Portland, TERRY of Gorham, THERIAULT of Fort Kent, THORNE of Carmel, WARREN of Scarborough, WHITE of Waterville, WILLIAMS of Bar Harbor, WOODSOME of Waterboro, WORTH of Ellsworth, ZAGER of Portland, ZEIGLER of Montville.

We had our public hearing at the end of last week and it was so heartening to see all of our diverse set of supporters and partners, a total of over 65 people, show up to testify in person or submit testimony online including the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, the Maine Education Association and many more. I would encourage you all to go online and read some of the testimony in support of this effort which include voices from students and teachers.

The work session for the bill was yesterday and we were able to reach compromise to craft some amendments including directing the funds directly to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension instead of first passing through the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. We appreciate Cooperative Extension being open to running this program and would like to note that this is not a part of their baseline budget but is an additional responsibility that they would be taking on as an important collaborator in outdoor education.

Outdoor School for All Maine Students would cost 6.2 million per year, so we would be asking for 12.4 million from the budget for two years of funding. This would cover the direct student costs for attending an outdoor school program and related administrative costs. The direct support is \$375/student for up to 14,000 students per year to participate in a three-day, two-night program. Administrative Costs for the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to run the program are about 950,000 per year.

There was a bipartisan unanimous ought to pass as an amendment vote out of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee yesterday which is why I am here today. Although we were not included in the Governor's change package, we believe that this effort is exactly what the Appropriations Committee should choose to support. It has large bipartisan effort; the community supports it; and it would add so much value to our state.

I think that Lydia McAlister an elementary student from West Paris said it best. She said that if this passes then "All kids in Maine will have the chance to try something for the first time, learn new skills, feel safe and supported, and build confidence that they can bring back to school and use for the rest of their lives."

I know from my own experience that Outdoor School programs have lasting impact and just recently was talking with former Speaker of the House, Ryan Fecteau, about his lasting memories attending an overnight program at The Ecology School when he was in 5th grade.

Thank you for considering this important mission in the budget this year. And please reach out if you have any additional questions.



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February 28, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.

I am Keith Crowley, Vice President of Program Services and Risk Management at Chewonki and a member of the Maine Outdoor School for All network. I live in Topsham. I am submitting testimony neither for nor against LD 258, the Governor's proposed fiscal year 2024-2025 biennial budget bill.

Maine Outdoor School for All is a network of outdoor education organizations that provide overnight outdoor school programming. The network began in 2010 with the Chewonki Foundation, The Ecology School, The University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and later was joined by Schoodic Institute. We will be expanding to other outdoor centers in the near future. The goal 13 years later, is the same and as simple as it was in year one... to ensure outdoor school is available to all Maine students.

We are working closely with Senator Brenner as the sponsor and a group of bipartisan legislators as the cosponsors for a legislative proposal to fund Outdoor School Programming for All Maine Students. This is based on outdoor school for all models currently in place in the states of Washington and Oregon.

An outdoor school program is a multi-day, hands-on field trip that combines team building, environmental science, and nature-based education. This can mean a lot of different things to different people across the country, but our programs have a shared outdoor education model based on the following principles:

- Use systems thinking, ecology, and sustainability integrated into our program models
- Provide three-day or longer residential (overnight) environmental learning programs
- Couple outdoor and in-school experiences over multiple years
- Foster teacher-driven professional development through ongoing collaboration
- Have a robust social-emotional curriculum
- Have a foundation in strong science and community-based/civics curriculum

For example, RSU 1 (Bath, Morse, Phippsburg, Woolwich) partnered with an outdoor school program and brought their 8th grade students on a multi-day paddle in the bay just miles from their town. The students paddled to Beal Island and found their art teacher waiting for them. The teacher led the students through an art lesson that captured the uniqueness of the natural surroundings and ecological systems. These students later showcased this artwork proudly at the local library during a celebration of learning.

Our network of four Outdoor School providers currently serves 87 different schools across the State. We estimate that less than a quarter of Maine's middle schoolers are provided with an overnight outdoor school program experience. Children not receiving this program are at a severe disadvantage for three main reasons.

First, outdoor education supports the child's educational journey. Significant research supports the benefits of outdoor school and supports increased achievement and comprehension in math and

science; improved testing scores and attendance; motivation to learn increases and class performance improves; and the programming directly supports systems thinking and STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) learning and meets state education curriculum standards.¹

Second, outdoor education also supports the child's emotional and mental health. In 2019, a Journal of American Medical Association Pediatric study found that Maine children have the highest percentage of mental health problems in the U.S.² This has only been exacerbated by the effects of Covid-19. All children would benefit from spending more time outside, and outdoor education helps boost a child's self-esteem by providing opportunities for them to gain leadership skills and make them more self-sufficient.

Here is an example of what happens when one child returned home from outdoor school. On a rainy day, a mother offered to drive her son a quarter mile to school so that he could stay dry. Instead, he put on his rain jacket, and said "Mom, I just camped outside for 4 days, this rain is nothing, I'm walking." This young person learned how to properly equip himself for the elements and gained the confidence to be self-sufficient.

Finally, outdoor education supports the child's connection to Maine's incredible outdoor heritage. Even beyond the important learning objectives, outdoor education provides opportunities for children to be outside learning about the bounty of Maine. Like the depth of its marine and estuarine resources and how to promote and develop Maine coastal fishing industries. Or the importance of protection and management of fish, wildlife, and habitat. Or the value of our agricultural and forest management programs. Or how to safely enjoy the outdoors to foster a lifelong love of getting outside. All of this leads to teaching our youngest citizens about the magic of Maine.

We think that all Maine students should benefit from the power of outdoor education.

We also think that teachers and schools benefit from outdoor education. We work with the schools who are currently accessing our programs before and after their field program to integrate learning objectives in their curriculum. This allows for lasting educational impacts and helps support teacher's learning objectives. We've also found that teachers' relationship with their students grows after an outdoor education program, because it allows each to experience the other in a new light. For example, we have had students and teachers who struggle to build a relationship inside the classroom completely change course after an outdoor school program because they tackled a new challenge together that the outdoors can offer but the traditional classroom cannot.

At the end of each experience, teachers commonly reflect about seeing their students in new lights. They use phrases like "I never knew she could do that", "It was phenomenal to see Johnny be so

¹ For more information please see [this brief](http://grayff.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Empirical-Evidence-Supporting-Benefits-of-Outdoor-School-and-Experiential-Learning-Programs_March-2015.pdf) prepared by an Outdoor School for All program in Oregon State. This brief was based on a literature review conducted by the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. http://grayff.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Empirical-Evidence-Supporting-Benefits-of-Outdoor-School-and-Experiential-Learning-Programs_March-2015.pdf.

² For more information, please see [the article](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377) from the Journal of American Medical Association Pediatric . <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377>.

eager to learn during the saltmarsh lesson", or "I feel like I learned some really great tips on how to engage students back at school."

We also know that our community benefits from outdoor education programs. For example, it benefits in regard to workforce development. Outdoor education programs introduce students to natural-resource-based careers like technical jobs in farming, fishing, and forestry. These industries need a skilled workforce and introducing these jobs to children in middle school enables them to get excited and envision a future career path in the fields, forests, or waters of Maine. Further, the states that have implemented these programs have already seen that middle schoolers who participated in their program have a continued interest in outdoor education and have started internships for high schoolers to teach in the outdoor education programs. And this doesn't just support future employment; it would have a significant impact on full-time employment jobs opportunities for people in Maine right now. Oregon, with about triple the number of students that Maine has, noted that outdoor school programming would support more than 600 jobs and more than 27 million dollars of income in Oregon on an annual basis.

Our bill, LR 1018, is yet to be printed, but it has a likely fiscal note of \$6.5 million that would fund a two-night, three-day program for 16,000 students which is the estimated cohort of students in a grade. This would allow for all Maine students to access an outdoor education program. This funding would be directed to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry which would then work with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to distribute grant fundings to the outdoor schools. The outdoor schools would use those funds to partner with schools to get the students and teachers to their centers.

This bill would also support research opportunities so we can study the impact of outdoor education in Maine on our students, teachers and communities. Outdoor School is quickly gaining ground across the country, and Maine has the opportunity to be a leader in this field.

I began pursuing a career in outdoor education at Unity College 20 years ago, and I have seen the incredible impacts outdoor education has on children, teachers, and families. I must tell you that pursuing this bill has been an incredibly rewarding process with Maine leaders responding positively and eager to share their outdoor school stories.

Thank you for considering this important mission in the budget this year. And please reach out if you have any additional questions.



