

MAINE

PRINCIPALS'

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Opportunity Organization*

TO: Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
FROM: Maine Principals' Association Legislative Committee
RE: Neither For Nor Against LD 550: An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools
DATE: March 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Dr. Holly Blair, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Principals' Association – Professional Division. The MPA represents more than 700 PreK-12 principals and assistant principals, CTE Directors and Assistant Directors, and Athletic Directors of public and private schools in Maine.

The MPA Legislative Committee is neither for nor against LD 550. While we strongly support outdoor, agricultural-based, and hands-on learning opportunities in Maine's public schools, as well as farm-to-sea initiatives for school meals, we have concerns about certain aspects of this bill that warrant further discussion.

Maine is a local control state, and while grant programs can be a valuable tool for expanding educational opportunities, they can also create unintended inequities among school districts. Not all districts have dedicated grant writers or the time and resources needed to navigate complex application processes and fulfill grant requirements. This could result in larger or better-resourced districts benefiting disproportionately while smaller or rural districts struggle to access funding and implement the intended programs.

Additionally, we are concerned about the source of funding for this initiative. The bill indicates that the money will come from the federal government, but there is a lack of clarity regarding the specific funding stream. Without a clear understanding of where these funds will originate and whether they are sustainable long-term, it is difficult to fully assess the impact of LD 550.

We support the intent behind this bill and believe that outdoor, agricultural, and hands-on learning should be encouraged in all Maine schools. However, we urge careful consideration of funding sources and equitable access to ensure that all students, regardless of their district's resources, can benefit from these opportunities.