

To the Committee,

My name is William Cliff, I am a registered Maine guide as well as a middle and high school history teacher from Houlton Maine. I am writing this letter in support of the Bill LD 895, "Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program". I believe that the funding that this bill would make available is crucial to the success of our economy and for the personal growth of our students. It should come as no surprise to any of you that one of our states largest industries is our outdoor recreation. According to Maine Outdoor Brands, it is a three billion dollar industry, and according to the state website it is one of the top four largest industries in the state. However, there is a problem; this field is constantly understaffed, and outdoor recreation providers frequently cite the lack of qualified candidates to fill the positions required to run their programs at full capacity. This bill would provide the funding needed to forge a pathway for students to gain skills in outdoor recreation and leadership to prepare them for a future in the outdoor recreation field.

If that isn't enough of a reason consider this: research consistently demonstrates the profound benefits of outdoor education. Studies from the University of Illinois found that spending time in nature improves cognitive function, attention span, and academic performance in children. Additionally, a 2019 study published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology revealed a significant link between exposure to natural environments and reduced stress levels, anxiety, and depression. An outdoor education class would provide Houlton students with invaluable opportunities to enhance their physical and mental well-being, develop crucial life skills, and foster a deep appreciation for the natural world.

I am currently trying to get a course up and running at our middle/high school here in Houlton Maine. But funding is tight, and we do not have the budget to support the creation of a program of the caliber that I think is warranted for our students. I implore you all to consider investing in the future of our state by passing this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

~William Cliff

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Houlton
LD 895

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