



**Testimony from Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership
Submitted by Bo Hoppin, Executive Director
In Support of LD 895, *An Act to Support Immersive Outdoor Education by Establishing
the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program* – March 13, 2025**

Senator Bennett and members of the distinguished Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Bo Hoppin. I live in the town of Camden, ME. I am submitting testimony in support of LD 895. As Executive Director of the Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership, I support expanding access to transformational outdoor education and experiences for Maine youth, as proposed by LD 895, *An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program*.

Hurricane Island is part of the town of Vinalhaven. We offer field-based learning experiences to Maine students on a coastal island 12 miles offshore from Rockland. Our residential programming is focused on integrating scientific education and scientific research. We engage students in real time marine science research through overnight experiences ranging from 2-10 days. Our education programs are structured for Maine youth in grades 6-12. The schools we serve expand the entire state including many communities from the mid-coast, Portland, Lisbon, Bethel, Belfast, Deer Isle, Presque Isle, Fort Kent and more.

We seek to make the lessons of the classroom come alive through real-world application in a dynamic environment, while simultaneously immersing students in the beauty of Maine's coast. It is this exposure that we feel is critical for students to make meaning of complex scientific concepts while also engaged with a dynamic marine economy and Maine's fishing industry.

The feedback we receive from teachers, parents and students makes it clear that exposing Maine's public, private and parochial school students to a truly unique environment, through hands-on learning, is essential for their academic and personal growth. Presque Isle High School teacher Liam Daniels eloquently captures why students from Aroostook county need the opportunity for immersive learning that exposes them to new parts of the state:

"Taking our students to Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership was truly an amazing experience. Living in Northern Maine often isolates us from the rest of the

state, but the staff of Hurricane Island have always gone above and beyond to get our students to connect to our coastal regions. Hurricane Island allowed our students to explore, experience, and learn about our world in new and exciting ways. From a teacher's perspective, the growth I was able to see from my students in such a short amount of time was staggering. My students not only grew academically, but socially and personally as well. Hurricane Island connects Presque Isle High School students to a global community focused on creating a better, sustainable future and provides truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to all who attend. We hope that our students continue to have access to Hurricane Island and all of the opportunities it has to offer them!"

– Liam Daniels, Presque Isle High School Alternative Education Teacher

LD 895 will provide the necessary support for students from all regions of Maine to connect to new parts of the state's astounding economy, history, culture and natural resources through an array of outdoor learning center infrastructure that already exists. An outcome of the successful passing and funding of LD 895 might be that students from Matinicus Isle study in Woodstock, Lewiston students could explore Winter Harbor and Washington County kids might investigate scientific concepts in Saco.

We need our students to understand how much Maine has to offer if they are to remain in the state and grow into productive careers as adults. These experiences will form the foundation for critical workforce development that is our future. The exposure created by this bill will be essential for a vibrant Maine economy that is driven by dynamic problem solvers who are grounded in our rich outdoor heritage and resources.

The innovative funding structure defined in this bill, and run by University of Maine Cooperative Extension, will establish a financial support structure that creates access to all schools while building an accountability model for the centers delivering services. Each of our programs will continue to raise matching funds as non-profits that will augment state support. LD 895 will build stability while enabling our centers us to reach many more students with the long-term goal of all Maine school age students engaged in an overnight, residential outdoor learning experience.

There is no better classroom than Maine's outdoors. Thank you for your commitment to our youth, our economy, our cultural heritage and our vast natural resources.

Bo Hoppin
Executive Director
Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership