



March 13, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

Testimony in Support of LD 550 An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools

Senator Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Laurel Costello, I am a resident of Cumberland, and I am a FoodCorps Alumni and current FoodCorps Alumni Advocacy lead for Maine. I am writing to support the passage of LD 550 An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools. I would like to thank Senator Guerin for introducing this legislation.

As a FoodCorps Service Member, I planned and developed programming, evaluated the needs of service sites, and implemented projects while both obtaining and retaining community buy-in. I built and managed school gardens, taught cooking lessons, and fostered skills and pride around a healthy school food environment. Furthermore, I worked with food service directors to incorporate farm to school programing and cook-from-scratch healthy food options from their school gardens. I then took on the position as Maine's FoodCorps Team Leader where I mentored and directed the success of new FoodCorps Service Members throughout Maine.

During my time spent with students at the Lincolnville Elementary school and Edna Drinkwater Elementary School, in Lincolnville and Northport, respectively, we were able to put in place hands-on garden, cooking, and nutrition education. I have seen firsthand the impact that agriculturally based hands-on experimental learning can have on the development of children. Experiential education supports comprehension of existing curriculum. School gardening leads to positive social outcomes. And we need dedicated experiential educators because existing teachers may lack horticultural experience, leading to a lack of confidence in school garden spaces.

I hope you will support LD 550 and other programs that help Maine children learn the way kids learn best, by doing. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Laurel Costello MS, RD, LD

Laurelkcostello@gmail.com