

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Room 214, Cross Building, Augusta, Maine
Thursday, March 13, 2025

Good morning, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Anne Sedlack, and I am from South Portland, Maine. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 895, An Act to Support Immersive Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.

Many of you might know me as a lobbyist, but I am testifying today as a private citizen. During my freshman year of college, my parents moved to Belfast, and I got a call from my Dad that his colleague's daughter was working at a summer camp in Lincolnville. He told me that I had to apply to the summer camp to make friends in a new state. 18-year-old Anne wanted to stay in Burlington and hang out with her college friends, but the next thing I knew, I was working at a random summer camp in the middle of Lincolnville.

It's cliché, but Tanglewood 4-H Camp changed my life forever. I ended up working there for four years summers, and I met some of my favorite people in the whole world there. I worked in all areas of the camp with children aged five to 18, so I got to witness the magic the outdoors has on children of all ages.

The five-year-old who plays "Meet a Tree," where they put a blindfold on and use all of their other senses to get to know a tree in the forest to try to find it again to the 16-year-old who has never been on the water before and ends the canoe trip by waking up at 3:00 am to travel down the final part of the St. George river to catch the tide out to the ocean. These children learn that the outdoors is our greatest asset. They know how nature can calm their brain down and be a place to find peace amongst a favorite birch tree or the babbling river.

But the reality is that the kids who attended this summer camp had parents who could afford to send them or had parents/teachers who knew how to take advantage of the various scholarships available for Maine students. Scholarships are beneficial but also a barrier to ensuring that all children can access the outdoors since there are limited slots and often a lengthy application to be considered.

This bill, and the previous iteration of it, LD 1817, from the 131st Legislature, which had over 110 cosponsors, passed unanimously out of this Committee, through the House and Senate, and got stuck on the funding table, ensure that ALL Maine children have equitable access to the outdoors for a two night and three-day trip during their school year. I can assure you that this experience will, like me, also change so many children's lives forever. It is a privilege to access the outdoors in such an immersive way, and we owe it to our children to ensure they can all access the outdoors.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

Best,
Anne Sedlack