



## **Testimony of**

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**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
on LD 550, An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential  
Learning in Public Schools**

**Thursday, March 20, 2025**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Dana Doran, and I am the Executive Director of the Professional Logging Contractors of the Northeast (PLC). The PLC is a regional non-profit educational organization that promotes professional logging and trucking throughout the Northeast, predominately in the state of Maine.

As background, the PLC was created in 1995 to give logging and associated trucking contractors a voice in a rapidly changing forest products industry. As of 2021, logging and trucking contractors in Maine employed over 3,000 people directly and were indirectly responsible for the creation of an additional 2,500 jobs. This employment and the investments that contractors make contributed \$582 million to the state's economy. Our membership, which includes over 200 contractor members in the state of Maine and an additional 125 associate members, is responsible for more than 80% of Maine's annual timber harvest.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of our membership in support of LD 550, An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools. The PLC would like to thank the sponsor for bringing this legislation forward.

By establishing the Maine Experiential Education Program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, and managing a grant program, schools will have an opportunity to deliver educational experiences they might not otherwise been able to provide. Although significant strides have been made in recent years, there is still more the state can do to provide learning experiences for students who don't fit the mold of the traditional public school system.

Today, every child does not learn the same nor do they all fit the mold of a traditional classroom learning environment. Programs like that which is proposed in this bill, can stimulate the creative mind of students to find their passion.

Currently, there are only five CTE schools in the state that include forestry education. However, over the last 10 years, the PLC has participated in the Maine Forest Collaborative, a non-traditional education program that works to educate students on Maine's natural resources. Part of the collaborative's mission states, "All Maine Forest Collaborative students are experiencing real-world, relevant learning opportunities, bringing them closer to understanding the careers available in our rural forest-based communities, and developing the skills necessary for success in those careers." It is vital to have programs like this to ensure one of our heritage industries is protected and well positioned for future generations.

Although it doesn't apply directly to this potential program, in 2015, we helped create the Mechanized Logging Operations and Forest Trucking (MLOFT) program, in partnership with the Maine Community College System. Currently, MLOFT is accepting applications for its 9<sup>th</sup> year. MLOFT gives students an opportunity to work on a real logging site using state of the art mechanized logging equipment. In addition to being trained on all the equipment, the students will also leave the program with a Class A, CDL license. Once the class is complete, we work with local contractors to help guide program graduates to employment opportunities available within the industry. MLOFT is an example of the benefits of non-traditional education that could be created if this legislation is passed out of this Committee.

The PLC appreciates the sponsor for continuing to explore avenues to enhance opportunities of alternative learning here in Maine. The forest is one of Maine's greatest natural resources and by educating more young people about forestry, it is a vital way to continue responsible and sustainable management in the future.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge you to vote ought to pass on this bill.