

Catherine Stivers
Topsham
LD 1543

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Catherine Stivers, 2 Balsam Drive, Topsham, ME, 04086
Date: April 21, 2025

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 1543 “An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Catherine Stivers, and I am a retired teacher and Maine Audubon environmental educator. I currently live in Topsham.

I am testifying in support of L.D. 1543 “An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network” as a fierce advocate for the conservation and proper stewardship of our state’s beautiful natural resources and landscapes. I’m also a staunch ally of Maine’s Wabanaki nations.

Research shows that values are best established at an early age, and so I devoted my 40-year teaching career to instilling the continuum of appreciation/awareness, action/advocacy to all ages. In alignment with Maine’s academic standards, I taught earth studies in public school classrooms, school yards and community green spaces, and found that exploration of the natural world is almost universally a high interest subject for children; and that local outdoor spaces and teacher resources to take students outside were greatly underdeveloped.

At one point, I taught Maine ecology to grades K-2 at Portland’s West End School, which educated neurodivergent children who struggled with self regulation. Throughout the program, the students were uncharacteristically attentive and on task. Staff and parents were highly skeptical that they could handle a disruption to their routine, but our coursework culminated in a local field trip, and the principal who accompanied us was floored at their enthusiasm, focus and attention to detail.

I often included Wabanaki studies in my ecology curriculum, and found that students, including immigrant children who often struggled with English, were unusually attentive to these lessons which featured hands-on classroom and outdoor investigation. Their keen interest and focus were palpable.

My decades of experience have reinforced my belief that experiential place-based studies of natural and cultural history are both highly appealing to students, and an absolute necessity to sustainable and respectful living in the future with the worldwide threats to habitats, cultures and species. We can and must do better.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage you to support L.D. 1543. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,
Catherine Stivers