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Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

RE: LD 1543 An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network

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

My name is Emily Weyrauch and I'm the Communications Coordinator for the Nature Based Education Consortium. I'm writing in support of the Maine Green Schools Bill, LD 1543. Thank you to Senator Rafferty and the bill's cosponsors for recognizing the importance of this initiative.

The Nature Based Education Consortium (NBEC) is a statewide intergenerational network seeking to increase equitable access to outdoor learning for all Maine youth. Our network is composed of students, teachers, educators and others passionate about outdoor and environmental learning across Maine.

NBEC is the proud host of the Climate Education Advocacy Working Group, a group of students, teachers, and environmental education champions that collaborate to vision and design innovative and community-led, equitable climate education policies in Maine. The Climate Education Advocacy working group was formed in 2020, when participants in NBEC convenings elevated climate education as an important priority they wanted to see advanced through the network. LD 1543 is the major priority of the Climate Education Advocacy Working Group this session.

Maine is a leader in outdoor and environmental learning. From the inclusion of climate education in the *Maine Won't Wait* climate action plan, to its Climate Education professional development pilot grant program benefiting schools across Maine; from the RREV grants which have invested in outdoor learning statewide, to the Governor's Outdoor Learning Initiative helping all students to connect to the natural world—Maine has demonstrated significant



support for outdoor and environmental learning and climate education over the years.

But unlike other states that are leaders in outdoor and environmental learning, Maine doesn't yet have a Green Schools Network. This means that the awe-inspiring student-led Green Schools sustainability and energy efficiency work happening locally in Maine schools is not connected to similar initiatives across the state. Schools currently lack the connective system needed to share successful ideas. This means that schools aren't able to learn from each other and help solve problems—which can mean a waste of resources and general inefficiencies.

We know firsthand the benefits of project-based hands-on environmental learning in schools. Outside of the myriad academic, health, social, and emotional benefits, outdoor and environmental learning also fosters leadership for students and creates pathways for career exploration and skill building in outdoor and environmental fields. Maine's workforce development depends on well-prepared students, and building a green economy begins with young people inspired to pursue new career paths.

Further, a Maine Green Schools Network will help teachers connect with others across Maine to support each other in their environmental initiatives. This network will give educators the tools they need to succeed in delivering standards-aligned curricula like Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Wabanaki Studies in an engaging, hands-on, interdisciplinary way.

Thank you so much for your consideration of LD 1543, the Maine Green Schools Network Bill. With robust benefits for schools, students, and teachers in Maine, a Green Schools Network is crucial for a thriving future for Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily Weyrauch
Communications Coordinator
Nature Based Education Consortium