

Maya Faulstich
Yarmouth ME
LD 1543

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

My name is Maya Faulstich, and I am a high school student in Yarmouth and a member of the Green Schools Youth Campaign. I am testifying in support of L.D. 1543 “An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network” because I believe that schools should have immersive learning, and share resources in order to enhance environmental education and the sustainability of our schools.

I am a leader of the Environmental Action Club at my high school, and something that our club has tried to do is to bring back reusable utensils in the cafeteria. When I talked to my administrators about doing this, they first wanted to know what other schools in Maine were doing and what worked and didn’t work for them, so we wouldn’t have to “reinvent the wheel”. At the time, I didn’t have a lot of connections and none of us knew where to look. If a Green Schools Network had existed, we could have easily found the resources we needed to learn from other schools and collaborate.

Since then, I’ve become a co-lead of Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ) High School Cohort, a group of students from high schools across Maine who meet and share resources and projects to improve our schools. I started a reusable dish program in Yarmouth, and because of the MYCJ high school cohort, students in Waterville have started a similar program. Together as a cohort, we’ve come up with ideas about how our schools could go plastic free and have tried different approaches, constantly sharing our challenges and helping each other learn and grow. But we can only do so much as students, we need support from educators and school districts to truly implement change. If students can organize and share resources, administrators and teachers should be given that opportunity too. A green schools network would tie the state together at all levels, facilitating the change we desperately need.

Another key piece of the green schools network is how it will expand experiential learning and give kids an opportunity to learn outdoors. Speaking from personal experience, I remember the lessons from hands-on activities and labs far better lectures. In my biology class, we grew our own plants and conducted experiments on them to learn about transpiration, which reinforced and enhanced the previous textbook readings. I recently had an incredible opportunity to visit the Galapagos on a school trip, and experiencing the biodiversity there and learning from local tour guides has introduced me to new ecological concepts, and new career paths. Students need more opportunities to learn about nature IN nature; we can’t expect students to care about something we haven’t been immersed in. A green schools network will help spread ideas and experiences so that every school can have robust environmental education.

There are so many opportunities that exist in Maine for schools to implement more sustainable systems, have better outdoor education, and for students to get jobs and volunteer hours that improve the environment. The missing piece is the connection; these opportunities exist but few students and teachers know about them. A Green Schools Network would provide that connection and act as a key puzzle piece in the jigsaw of a sustainable future.

Please support LD 1543, for the betterment of all students and educators. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,
Maya Faulstich