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LD 1543

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ATTN: LD 1543 "An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network"

Dear Chairman Rafferty & Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

As a former director Outdoor Preschool director and teacher, and now in my role as an Outdoor Learning Consultant, I strongly support the passage of the LD 1543 "An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network". The research we now have on the power of green spaces to promote student engagement, hands-on learning while also supporting students' mental and physical health as well as their focus, attention and academic success is something we can no longer ignore. Simply put, children have learned outdoors through exploration of the natural world as long as our species has existed, and they have a right to experience nature in meaningful ways, not only for their general well-being, but for the simple joy of experiential learning that is well-supported in studies on human learning theory.

Despite the growing awareness of the broad benefits of green spaces and nature experience for students, practices such as enhanced recess, outdoor classrooms, and nature-rich school environments remain underrepresented internationally, including in the United States. With this bill, Maine has an opportunity to become a leader in best practices for place-based education, community and service-driven initiatives and Green Schools infrastructure.

I urge you to acknowledge the research that shows us that all humans need nature yet there are growing barriers that limit students' access to green spaces, sustainability practices and meaningful nature learning. When schools prioritize outdoor learning and nature experience (even for children as young as preschool), they are making a critical investment in students' physical and mental health, overall wellbeing, and their opportunity to experience meaningful learning in nature while ensuring that these same students grow up to become environmental stewards in a rapidly changing world.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. For additional resources or support, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan Chlebowski

Outdoor Learning and Play Consultant

PARS Playworker, UK

Forest School Guide, FSA, Under the Hazels, UK

"Nothing you do for children is ever wasted." ~ Garrison Keillor