

Sarah Somes
Portland
LD 1543

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Sarah Somes, Portland 04101
Date: April 25, 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 Sarah Somes, and I am an ed tech at Greely Middle School and I live in Portland. Previously, I worked as a SNAP-Educator in public schools throughout Cumberland County. I am testifying in support of L.D. 1543 "An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network" because I believe the bill will have a critical impact on students, educators, and schools.

Throughout my own education and now working with students, I see how beneficial it is to ground learning in real world applications to help students connect with material and foster a love of learning. Equally important, I have witnessed how bringing learning out of the classroom improves student engagement as well as their mental and physical wellbeing. This bill will facilitate climate education opportunities for students statewide.

While schools are free to choose whether or not to join the Maine Green Schools Network, doing so will provide pathways to funders and community partners to help save money through building adaptations and efficient upgrades to transportation systems, food ways, and land use. Time and money are desperate resources for school districts, and the network will save both by consolidating resources and sharing materials so educators are not left to themselves to create curriculum or pose efficiency updates to the district. The curricula shared through the network will help root classrooms in place-based learning including desperately lacking Wabanaki Studies and exploration of career-based learning in Maine's natural resources.

As a SNAP-Educator, I supported the South Portland Middle School in establishing a school garden, and witnessed the value it brought to the community. Despite many willing community volunteers, I felt overwhelmed and uncertain at times of how to connect the garden to teachers and students and searched tirelessly for blueprints to follow. Having an established network to share resources and best practices would eliminate countless hours of research and questioning in this process. As a non-mandatory service for schools with no fiscal note, L.D. 1543 is a clear choice to enhance students' learning experience, open up their skill development and place-based career interests, and save schools time and money in the long term by embracing environmentally efficient practices.

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

Sincerely,
Sarah Somes