

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Nell Houde, 2 Eagle Lodge Lane, Dresden, ME 04342, Nature Based Education Consortium  
Climate Education Advocacy Working Group

Date: April 25th, 2025

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

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

My name is Nell Houde, and I am an outdoor educator and environmental literacy professional, living in Dresden, and working all over the state of Maine to support experiential ecology and climate resilience initiatives in schools.

I am testifying today as the co-chair of the Nature Based Education Consortium’s Climate Education Advocacy group in support of L.D. 1543 “An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network.” I have had the distinct privilege of working with the amazing group of educators, students, sustainability professionals, non-profit partners, parents and others who have materialized their vision of a connected, supportive, and forward-thinking Green Schools Network in Maine through the introduction of this bill. They believe, as do I, that a Green Schools Network are necessary for the following reasons:

1. A Green Schools Network is essential in the long-term implementation of Maine’s Environmental Literacy Plan and Maine’s Climate Action Plan *Maine Won’t Wait*.
2. A Green Schools Network will support and uplift the work teachers and students have already been undertaking to make schools more sustainable with more opportunities for hands-on environmental and climate education.
3. A Green Schools Network makes replication of successful projects specific to Maine’s context and ecosystems possible, so that schools do not feel like they are building from nothing as they take on these new projects.

As an educator, I spend my days doing environmental literacy projects with students of all ages all around Maine. Having spaces to access at school where students can learn how to grow a plant, or see how a wasp feeds on pollen, or eat the food they grew themselves, or smell compost and more fully understand the processes of waste are essential; all of these learning moments help shape students as human beings understanding their role as one life form sharing a planet with so many others. Many schools do not have the infrastructure or outdoor space to support this type of learning, which both jeopardizes their own resiliency in the coming age of climate upheaval, and robs students of the chance to experience authentic learning in and out of their classrooms.

For decades, youth around the state have been pushing their schools to take on sustainability projects that better the material conditions of their learning environments. Students want to learn in dignified

spaces compatible with life. By animating a Green Schools Network, we are listening to students who have long been asking for the places they spend so much time every day to waste less, take less, offer more. You will hear students testify today, and I encourage you to take their testimony most seriously. They are the leaders in this work.

For these reasons, I wholeheartedly encourage you to listen to the vision of a future of education that students, teachers, and caring community members hold and support L.D. 1543. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Nell Houde