

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Michelle Gharst, Belmont, ME

Date: April 25, 2025

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

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

My name is Michelle Gharst, and I am writing in strong support of LD 1543: *An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network*. As a former environmental educator and a parent who homeschooled my now high school-aged daughter, I’ve had the privilege of watching her grow with a deep and meaningful relationship to the land around us. From an early age, she had the opportunity to see the natural world not just as something to observe, but as something to engage with, and learn from.

This deep sense of place has evolved into a powerful feeling of responsibility to take action during this critical time, to work toward creating positive change. I believe that every young person in Maine should have the opportunity to develop this same sense of responsibility—empowering them to not only learn about the environmental challenges we face but to feel equipped and motivated to be part of the solution.

As a parent and educator, I’ve seen firsthand how critical it is to connect students with the world around them. Learning in and from nature doesn’t just enrich their education—it shapes their values, enhances their resilience, and fosters a lifelong commitment to protecting the planet. With the urgency of the climate crisis, we need our schools to do more than just teach; they must inspire and equip students to lead in this time of accelerating change.

LD 1543 offers an incredible opportunity to expand and amplify the work already being done in Maine’s schools—helping to establish a statewide Green Schools Network that will bring together educators, students, and communities to share resources, knowledge, and inspiration. It ensures that no matter where they are, every student will have access to the tools they need to make a difference.

I urge you to pass this bill so that all of Maine’s students, and especially our youth, can feel empowered to take action in protecting the earth for future generations.

Sincerely,

Michelle Gharst