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## ***Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs***

### ***LD 1543—An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network***

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Karen Blakelock and I am a policy advisor for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to offer comments in support of LD 1543, An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that both nature and people can thrive. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

TNC is a founding member and continued supporter of the Nature Based Education Consortium whose mission is to ensure that every Maine youth has access to powerful outdoor learning experiences. We recognize that when people have meaningful outdoor experiences their quality of life, health and social wellbeing improve, and in turn their communities become stronger and more sustainable – and we all benefit. Not all people have the opportunity for positive experiences in nature, but schools and learning institutions should be places for all young people to gain access to the outdoors.

Maine's outdoor heritage and natural resources provide incredible natural classrooms for learning. There are many schools and other youth organizations that are already deeply connected to their local, natural, and human communities; however, in all too many instances, schools and other programs for young people are challenged to connect curriculum with their own communities, the natural world, and Maine's natural resources.

A recent poll indicated that 87% of respondents believe that kids not spending enough time outdoors in nature is a serious problem, and 74% indicated that providing more opportunities for Maine residents, particularly kids, to get outdoors and enjoy nature is a priority.<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> 2018 Maine Conservation Survey, Public Opinion Strategies and FM3 Research, May 10-13, 2018. Commissioned by The Nature Conservancy in Maine.

TNC continues to work with several groups across the state to ensure that ALL young people, regardless of their background or socio-economic circumstances, have access to the outdoor learning opportunities afforded by Maine's heritage and natural resources.

We ask that this committee **vote Ought to Pass on LD 1543** to establish the Maine Green Schools Network to facilitate a statewide pipeline for deepening youth connections to nature through learning, service, and leadership. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment.