

Laura Newman
Portland
LD 1543

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

My name is Laura Newman and I am an outdoor play/learning space consultant. I live in Portland and work with educators and schools across the state.

I am testifying in support of L.D. 1543, "An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network" because over the 22 years since I have been supporting green school ground projects, I have only seen the demand for these places grow. This is not because they are "in style". It is because children are increasingly showing mental health, behavioral and learning issues which have been tied in part to deprivation of time outdoors interacting with nature; a growing body of research shows that, conversely, outdoor play/learning in nature boosts mental and physical health, social and emotional development, and academic success.

Thinking that play can only be supported by manufactured play equipment is actually a relatively new concept, driven now by a large industry that charges hundreds of thousands of dollars per carbon-intensive steel and plastic structures - structures which are thrown away and replaced every 12-15 years due in part to insurance and liability fears.

There is a persistent demand from educators at all levels in better understanding and implementing student access to time in nature. I have taught a course on outdoor classroom design at UMF, will be teaching one at Antioch UNE, and have taught 6 sessions of an online training for early childhood educators on this concept via Maine Roads to Quality, based at USM.

I would be more than happy to elaborate on the work we have done with schools and share stories from schools and educators who see the benefits to students.

I strongly encourage support of this bill which includes the consideration of green school grounds.

Thank you,
Laura Newman