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*Testimony of Rep. Kathy Shaw presenting*  
**LD 1682, An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program**  
*before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry*

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and fellow members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. As you know, I am Kathy Shaw, and I represent part of Auburn. I am pleased to present **LD 1682, An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program**.

This bill would create a learning experience for all levels of education by offering students the opportunity to learn to grow from the “ground up” their own food, from acquiring seeds, planting, transplanting seedlings and then caring for and harvesting that food.

Coming from a small farming family, my siblings and I early on had to help my mother care for and harvest from her garden – but before my mother would ever enter her garden, it was up to us little kids to chase out the snakes and toads, we might have missed a few every now and then, it was fun to hear her shriek.

So, at the correct times of the year, we planted radishes, carrots and lettuces, soaked the pea and corn seeds, planted in hills cukes, squashes and melons. Dug potatoes and pulled cabbages, carrots and beets. We harvested Concord grapes for jelly, pulled corn from the stalks for canning and climbed all over apple and pear trees for the fruits to make dried fruit leather, cider and sauces. Our gardens fed our immediate family and our extended family seasonally and all winter long. The grocery stores in very rural Massachusetts at that time were a good distance away and dropping in to grab a can of peas or a loaf of bread were not easy options.

We live in very different times now with the availability of foods readily at our finger tips, but locally grown, fresh food is something else entirely. We are at risk of losing the art of growing our own foods. As we lose touch with this most basic and fundamental experience of being human – the ability to feed ourselves and our families – we also lose touch with our natural environment. Reigniting that connection is critical to the health of our planet and the health of our communities.

Experiential learning is an impactful way to engage students who might otherwise have a difficult time in the classroom. Giving schools an opportunity, without mandating a curriculum

change, to provide hands on learning experiences opens up new potential for deepening connections to art, science, history and other academic subjects while also equipping the next generation with these fundamental skills to feed and fend for themselves.

This bill would expand on current garden programs and provide key funding to make experiences like mine accessible for more students in our public schools. This will allow schools to feasibly grow and maintain experiential programs to support Maine students' physical health and their mental and behavioral development across the state, while teaching them lifelong skills that will in turn help to maintain and cultivate our heritage industries. I urge your support.

Thank you,

Kathy Shaw