

Testimony Presented by The Ecology School on LD 1682 – Wednesday, April 26, 2023 @ 1pm
Resolve, An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry Committee:

My name is Drew Dumsch, and I am a resident of Saco, Maine and President & CEO of The Ecology School, a nonprofit outdoor school and environmental living & learning center located at the historic 105-acre River Bend Farm on the Saco River in rural southwest Saco. I am also a member of the Maine Outdoor School for All Network which is a state-wide collaboration of experiential learning centers offering multi-day overnight programs for students and classroom teachers throughout Maine. For 24 years The Ecology School has had the honor to work with thousands of Maine students and their classroom teachers to support their experiential learning in the curriculum areas of agriculture, conservation, forestry, environmental science and sustainability

LD 1682— An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program — will support innovative experiential education for more Maine students and ensure that Maine K-12 schools increase opportunities to partner with nonprofit education providers of farm, forestry and conservation education programs in Maine. Given this history and legacy of our state's natural resources and the amazing opportunities that learning outside provides to Maine students, I'm excited that this bill will support more children learning where their food comes from and even learning to grow their own food. Understanding the importance of agriculture, forestry and conservation to Maine's economy and workforce will be an important outcome of supporting more experiential, outdoor education for students, classroom teachers and schools throughout Maine.

In addition, LD 1682 will provide support to the Maine Farm and Sea to School Network, an amazing experiential education initiative that brings together partners such as USDA, UMaine Cooperative Extension, Maine Agriculture in the Classroom, Maine School Garden Network, GMRI and the Maine Department of Education to convene a summer institute that benefits entire school districts with experiential education training for teachers, students, school administrators and school food service staff. The Ecology School was honored to host the first Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute at our River Bend Farm campus last August and we look forward to hosting the next Institute this July.

I can also appreciate the experiential learning piece of this bill because I have been working with the Maine Outdoor School for All Network on legislation that will come to you later this session and was just printed yesterday. As someone who has been active for many years with the Maine Environmental Education Association and the Nature Based Education Consortium, I can attest to the many strong partnerships between public schools and nonprofit experiential education providers that exist throughout the state. Unfortunately, given current school budgets, funding for experiential learning is limited even though studies have shown that the health, learning and behavior of children all improve through outdoor focused, hands-on learning. For example, children that receive 10 or more hours of hands-on gardening and cooking lessons consume three times more fruits and vegetables than peers that did not get these lessons. In addition, students who participate in science learning in school gardens score higher on science aptitude tests. And student group behavior improves for every 15 minutes students spend outside.

I strongly urge this Committee to consider and pass all legislation that supports getting our children more experiential learning in agriculture, conservation and forestry.

Thank you,



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