

DATE May 10, 2023
TO Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
FROM Nicholas Fisichelli, PhD Schoodic Institute at Acadia National Park
RE LD 1817, An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Plueker, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry My name is Nicholas Fisichelli As President and CEO with Schoodic Institute at Acadia National Park, a nonprofit science and education organization, I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1817

This legislation is about equity and access For the past 15+ years, it has been the lucky few kids who have had an outdoor school experience in Maine Only those families and schools with the means and an existing partnership with an outdoor school have been able to provide this immersive education The network of outdoor schools in Maine today reaches thousands of kids every year, but this amounts to less than a quarter of the students in a single grade Thus, most students are left inside, disconnected from the learning that can happen beyond the walls of a classroom, disconnected from their outdoor heritage, and disconnected from career pathways in forestry, farming, fishing and other outdoor industries This disconnect is especially true for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, kids who are not shown the path forward towards meaningful outdoor careers within their own communities We can do better

LD 1817 is needed to ensure that every student has an outdoor school opportunity during one grade of their school years Fully funded, this legislation would annually support the equivalent of an entire grade of students in Maine, roughly 14,000, attending a three-day, two-night outdoor education program Over the long term, every student would have an opportunity during one year between 4th and 8th grades to attend an outdoor school Participating local school districts determine the appropriate grade and partner with an outdoor school of their choosing

The requested funding, \$6.2 million/year, covers the direct student costs for attending an outdoor school program and related administrative costs The direct support is \$375/student for ~14,000 students/year to participate in a three-day, two-night program Administrative costs to run this program are ~\$950,000/year

As I mentioned, there is a thriving network of outdoor schools in Maine poised to scale up and work with all school districts and all Maine students This is a model that outdoor schools have been refining for decades The outdoor schools bring private individual, foundation, and corporate support to supplement, but not replace, state funding This includes teacher development and support, and building relationships with school districts to facilitate outdoor school experiences

Thank you for your continued support of our outdoor heritage and the next generation of outdoor leaders