

May 9, 2023

Deb Paredes, Climate Action Resident  
The Nature Conservancy in Maine  
deborah.paredes@tnc.org



***Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry***

***RE: LD 1817 – An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program***

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Deb Paredes and I am the Climate Action Resident at The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1817, An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.** We want to especially thank Senator Brenner and Representative Carlow for bringing this bill forward, along with the many cosponsors including members of this committee.

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 nature and people can thrive together. 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. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

LD 1817 establishes the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program to provide immersive outdoor education opportunities to students in grade 4 through grade 8. The bill would provide annual funding and capacity to establish the program and connect Outdoor School providers directly with Maine schools and school districts. Importantly, this effort would focus on equitable access, evaluation, and the formation of an Outdoor School for All Advisory Committee.

As an organization rooted in science and working with Maine communities on climate change mitigation and adaptation, TNC believes that addressing the climate crisis requires a clear understanding of the causes of climate change, its impacts on people and the environment in Maine and across the globe, and the ways that policymakers, communities, and individuals can act to create effective and equitable solutions. This starts with education, and LD 1817 would create foundational opportunities for Maine students to access hands-on, climate and outdoor education experiences. Acting on climate change requires looking toward the future, and this bill makes a direct investment in the people who will shape that future.

TNC urges the committee to support LD 1817. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and I am available to answer questions at any time.