



Testimony Presented by The Ecology School in Support of LD 1817
Wednesday, May 10, 2023 @ 9am - Resolve, An Act to Support Outdoor Education by
Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

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

My name is Drew Dumsch and I'm 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 in Saco. I am also one of the founding members of the Maine Outdoor School for All Network, a state-wide collaboration of experiential learning centers that for the past 14 years has offered multi-day overnight programs and funding for thousands of students and classroom teachers throughout Maine.

This morning you've heard testimony in strong support of LD 1817 from your colleagues in the senate and the house, from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, from UMaine Cooperative Extension, and from leaders in education and the environment. And more importantly, you've heard from those who will benefit most from the Outdoor School for All Maine Students program: students and their classroom teachers. You've heard testimony focused on workforce development, the mental health of Maine's children, the potential for groundbreaking evaluation and research in innovative education and the great importance of celebrating Maine's outdoor heritage. This focus on agriculture, forestry and conservation linked to Maine's economy and workforce development will be a crucial, lasting outcome of supporting more experiential, outdoor education for students, classroom teachers and schools throughout Maine through multi-day, overnight outdoor school programs.

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 and this important work will grow and expand with the passage of the Outdoor School for All Maine Students bill. I can also attest to the fact that the State of Maine is seen as a national leader in environmental education, conservation, innovation in agriculture and the programs offered by outdoor schools. Just last month Maine's Senator Susan Collins co-sponsored the federal, bipartisan No Child Left Inside Act to help more students reconnect with nature, experience the great outdoors, and fund educational programs that aim to get children outside. This federal act would include a national pilot project for outdoor schools including the Maine Outdoor School Network and LD 1817 will place Maine in a top position to potentially receive these federal funds.

Last week I was at a national green building conference in Washington, D.C. and presented a workshop focused on outdoor school innovation. When I mentioned that Senator Brenner's bill has 113 bipartisan co-sponsors, there was a loud and very impressed collective gasp in the room. My reaction was to smile to the assembled conferees from around the country in that room and say, "113 co-sponsors on a Maine bill is a perfect example of the exciting collaboration and education that is happening in Maine right now because getting more kids outside through experiential programs is something everyone can get behind!"

I strongly urge this Committee to consider and pass LD 1817 to support providing students across Maine more memorable and immersive experiential learning in agriculture, conservation and forestry.

Thank you,

Drew Dumsch

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