



Statement of Support to LD 1817
An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All
Maine Students Program
May 10, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the distinguished Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry My name is Keith Crowley I live in the Town of Topsham I am Chewonki's VP of Program Services and a member of the Maine Outdoor School For All network I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1817

Maine Outdoor School for All is a network of outdoor education organizations that provide overnight outdoor school programming The network began in 2010 with The Ecology School, 4-H, Chewonki Foundation, and later was joined by Schoodic Institute We expect to be joined by other members within the next few weeks The goal 13 years later, is the same and as simple as it was in year one to ensure outdoor school is available to all Maine students

An outdoor school program is a multi-day, hands-on field trip that combines team building, environmental science, and nature-based education This can mean a lot of different things to different people across the state, but our programs have a shared outdoor education model based on the following principles

- Integrate systems thinking, ecology, and sustainability into our program models

- Provide three-day or longer residential (overnight) environmental learning programs
- Couple outdoor and in-school experiences over multiple years
- Foster teacher-driven professional development through ongoing collaboration
- Have a robust social-emotional curriculum
- Have a foundation in strong science and community-based/civics curriculum

Given Maine's phenomenal rivers, lakes, mountains, forests, and coastline, it saddens me to know our network serves only 25% of Maine's middle schoolers. Often these schools represent urban areas rather than rural and remote communities.

Those children who are not receiving this program are at a severe disadvantage. I'm confident that you will hear in other testimony today that these programs.

- 1 Lead to improved testing scores, attendance, and student engagement
- 2 Boost a child's social growth and provide mentoring
- 3 Improve deepen the relationship between the school teacher and student
- 4 Support workforce development through exposing students to jobs including in farming, forestry, and education

We are working with Senator Brenner and a group of 113 bipartisan legislators/cosigners to fund Outdoor School Programming for All Maine Students. The states of Washington and Oregon have recently passed similar legislation.

Our bill, LD 1817, is yet to be printed but represents \$6.2 million annually to provide access to this program for all students.

Outdoor school programs are quickly gaining ground across the country, and Maine has the opportunity to be a leader in this effort. Oregon and Washington have already passed similar bills.

I began pursuing a career in outdoor education at Unity College 20 years ago, and I have seen the incredible impacts outdoor education has on children, teachers, and communities. I must tell you that pursuing this bill has been an incredibly rewarding process with Maine leaders responding positively and eager to share their outdoor school stories.

Thank you for considering this important mission. And please reach out if you have any additional questions.