

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 Sarah Timm I live and work in the Oxford Hills, and I am our school district's Outdoor Learning Coach I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1817

As a classroom teacher for 20 years, I worked to provide my students with outdoor learning opportunities when it was possible and convenient Without support, however, these efforts were sporadic and not particularly relevant to grade level standards or student needs I took kids outside because it felt like the right thing to do

From time to time, however, my students and I had the opportunity to visit the Bryant Pond 4H Camp, often for an overnight experience These trips were when I felt most alive as a teacher *and* as a student There was the long afternoon I spent enraptured while one of their educators taught my class about the history of firemaking Or the hike we once took to the top of Mt Christopher in an early April snowfall, examining old cellar holes and newly formed vernal pools Or, simply watching my students' delighted faces as they sat, family-style, around the dinner table together, a rare experience for many of them, and made conversation about their busy days, sharing food and stories I knew, during these short trips to this very special place, that this was the teaching and learning that meant the most to me and, clearly, to my students I knew that these experiences would change their lives, as well as mine

I now have the privilege of being my district's first ever Outdoor Learning Coach, due to a RREV Award from the Maine DoE which funds my position I am currently immersed in the world of outdoor education and work outside with students every day, as well as supporting teachers and administrators in the professional development and facilities they need for these types of endeavors If not for the inspiration I received from our school visits to camp, I would never have dreamed this dream job I have the honor of working at something which I am more passionate about than anything else helping children get outside Away from screens, and seats, and walls, so that they can be calmed by the sounds of the outdoors, and

focused by their natural surroundings. Every day, I see firsthand the benefits of taking children outside. Academically, their work is richer and more meaningful. Socially, they are in a far better place just by leaving the confines of their classrooms. Behaviorally, they can cope more easily, simply because they're in a safe, calming, natural space.

I have read, in my research, that taking students outside is as effective as ADHD medication. All children deserve the best we can give them. The world has given them screens, both at home and now, more and more frequently, at school, and it has given them a pandemic to struggle through during their formative years, requiring isolation and yet more screen time. In order to negate the difficulty that's been inflicted upon them, we must strive to provide for *all* children the antidote to the modern world, and the mental and social problems that seem, at times, inescapable. This antidote is time outside, to work and play and connect. Time to be themselves.