

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 Flora Bliss I live in Scarborough I am here to speak in support of LD 1817 - An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

I grew up on my parents farm In late fall my father and I would put on heavy jackets and boots and don bright orange caps and tromp out to the edge of our fields We would step into the woods where the leaves had fled their branches and now crunched underfoot and where the hardiest of the songbirds still lingered I have vivid memories of the sun shining through the bare canopy of forest and the way the rivulets of tree bark felt under my fingers

I would collect the best acorns and load my pockets with them, to be discovered later and unloaded onto the kitchen table I would creep down to the river and test the ice, finding it held I would lay for long minutes on the hard surface watching the water carry little bits of moss and guessing at where the frogs had buried themselves under the chilly mud Somedays, I would walk to the old graveyard way back in the woods where a previous farm family's remains rest There is a small clearing lined with gnarled fruit trees and cattails taller than me I would make up stories about the mysterious people and imagine their lives, and what their children had been like I would explore the ruins of their burned down farmhouse and barn and collect little trinkets like rusted out wrenches and wheel spokes, to be stashed with the acorns

I have a deep appreciation for this planet we live on, and I believe this appreciation formed in those moments when I counted tadpoles in the vernal pools, when I climbed to the highest branches of our huge ashtree, and when I sat in the waterfall and let the water run through my toes

I hope that someday every child will have the opportunity to appreciate moments like these By passing this bill, we will open the door for kids who would not all normally be able to see the outdoors, giving the youngest generations access to appreciate nature

This will mean that as they grow up, our children will have a sense of what the natural world can offer A next generation willing to take on the work of farming, fishing and

environmental stewardship is what Maine needs I myself know that I want to spend my career outdoors, with my hands in the soil surrounded by life, and it was my childhood experiences that have swayed me to be a farmer

As a young person I stand here and implore my elders to take this next step in accessibility for all

Thank you