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Testimony from Senator Russell Black

In support of LD 1817, "An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program"

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

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Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and fellow members on the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, I am Senator Russ Black of Wilton and I proudly represent the good people of Franklin, Somerset, and Kennebec Counties in District 5. I am pleased to provide testimony in support and be a cosponsor of LD 1817, "An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program."

As most of you know, I am a farmer and a logger by trade, and own Black Acres Farm in Wilton, which specializes in grass-fed beef cattle and hogs, as well as maple syrup. Not only do I love the work that I do, I am equally as proud of the impact our farm has on our community and the surrounding region. Supporting community is so important to me and it is a lens I look through when considering policy proposals in Augusta. This is one of many reasons I support LD 1817.

The impact of outdoor education programs extends far beyond the classroom. They positively benefit workforce development, an issue that lawmakers discuss daily as to what we can do to provide the right environment for our younger generations to have career opportunities here in Maine that supports our nature-based economy. By introducing students to outdoor educational experiences at an early age, we can expose children to a world of possibilities of future jobs in the areas of agriculture, forestry, conservation and environmental science.

We can look to other states that have outdoor education school programs available statewide to their students to see the lasting impact these programs have had beyond the middle school years. In states like Oregon and Washington, students who participated in outdoor school programs have continued that interest in outdoor and environmental education. Some students have pursued teaching outdoor school programs while in high school and then have continued with nature-based jobs in later years. And in Oregon, they have experienced full-time employment directly related with these multi-day, overnight outdoor education school programs. Figures show that outdoor school programming annually supports more than 600 jobs and more than \$27

million of income in Oregon. Although Maine's population is approximately one-third of Oregon's, we could expect hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars pumped into our state's economy. Those are real jobs, benefitting Maine people, and they are jobs that are a natural fit to what makes Maine such a special place to live.

More than 100 of my colleagues support LD 1817, with many of them sitting around this horseshoe today. Thank you for supporting opportunities to provide Maine students with educational programs such as what is proposed in LD 1817.