



**maine
environmental
education
association**

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March 13, 2025**

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

***RE: LD 550 An Act to Support Agriculture-based Hands-On Experiential
Education in Public Schools***

Dear Sen. Talbot Ross, Rep. Pluecker and the members of the committee,

My name is Olivia Griset and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Environmental Education Association (MEEA). I am here **to testify in support of LD 550.**

MEEA is a statewide professional nonprofit network representing over 2,000 Maine educators, including classroom teachers as well as community-based educators at nature centers, land trusts and government agencies. For over forty years, we have supported Maine educators in providing high quality, locally relevant, hands-on outdoor experiences for Maine youth.

MEEA also serves as the state affiliate to the North American Association for Environmental Education, and through our work there we know that Maine is a national leader in the outdoor and environmental education sector. We know the work that Food Corps and the Maine Farm & Seat to School Institute does, in collaboration with government agencies, to support educators in leading Agriculture education programs in Maine schools is essential to advance the goals in the Maine Environmental Literacy Plan.

When I was a high school teacher I ran a greenhouse and started a school garden program with my students. I will never forget the day when one of my 16 year old students ran out of the greenhouse into my classroom and said “ Ms. Griset-Lettuce is a plant, like it grows out of the ground?” This was a really big reframe moment for me

as an education that my students had become very disinterested with their food. Through the years the garden program became one of the most impactful things I did with my students- but at the same time as a teacher it was really challenging to run a garden program on top of all the other things I had to do. The only way I was able to do this was through collaboration and support from networks and community based organizations who provided the training, funding, and support I needed to keep this program flourishing. LD 550 would create the support necessary to ensure that more schools and teachers in Maine could have programs like a school garden- that would create living laboratory opportunities for students to learn and grow.

The research is clear that experiential nature-based learning works in K-12 schools. In a recent meta-analysis led by Stanford University of over 100 research studies conducted over the last 20 years- it is clear that nature-based education in K-12 schools is a powerful approach for learning. They found that these types of learning experiences increased: knowledge gains in core content subjects like math and literacy, self esteem and leadership skills, critical thinking skills, motivation for learning, and feelings of empowerment and the ability to take action. When our youth get to have positive community-based learning experiences they gain a greater sense of place and connection to this state, making it more likely they will want to stay here to pursue careers, contribute to the Maine economy, raise their families, and participate in their local communities.

For all these reasons, I urge you to support ***LD 550 An Act to Support Agriculture-based Hands-On Experiential Education in Public Schools.***