

Good afternoon. Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.. I am Norman Higgins, former State Representative from Dover-Foxcroft and I had the privilege of serving on this Committee. I am currently the Chair of the Maine Charter School Commission. I am in support of LD 550, An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools.

The Maine Charter school Commission authorizes, monitors and evaluates ten public charter schools in Maine. Charter schools provide public funding for school choice for students to pursue targeted academic opportunities in non-traditional schools. Today, I am delighted to introduce two of our charter schools.

I have had the privilege of visiting the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences in Hinckley, Maine which is project-based, student centered instruction focusing on agriculture, sustainability, forestry and the environment.

I have had the privilege of visiting the Ecology Learning Center in Unity, Maine which is focused on the environment and sustainable ecosystems. The school embodies the intent of this legislation.

I would like to add that both of these schools are members of the Can We Project primarily located in high schools in the Portland area supporting teams of students fostering civil engagement.

Maine Charter schools appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this process.