



**Testimony Presented by The Ecology School in Support of LD 895**  
Thursday, March 13, 2025 @ 9am - Resolve, An Act to Support Immersive Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program



**Good morning Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry Committee:**

My name is Drew Dumsch and I'm a resident of Saco, Maine and President & CEO of The Ecology School, a nonprofit outdoor school and environmental living & learning at the historic 313-acre River Bend Farm in Saco. I am also one of the founding members of the *Maine Outdoor School for All Network* that for the past 15 years has offered multi-day overnight programs and funding for thousands of students and classroom teachers throughout Maine.

*Outdoor School for All Maine Students* is a state-wide pilot program concept that had strong support in the 131<sup>st</sup> legislature in the Senate and the House, from Republicans, Democrats, and Independents (113 cosponsors!), and has support now from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry, from UMaine Cooperative Extension, superintendents and principals, teachers and students, and from leaders in the outdoor industry, education and the environment. More importantly is who benefits from the Outdoor School for All Maine Students program: 7,000 Maine students and their classroom teachers! You've heard LD 895 testimony today focused on workforce development, mental health in Maine's children, the potential for groundbreaking education impact and the importance of celebrating Maine's outdoor heritage.

I've been active for many years with the Maine Environmental Education Association and the Maine Land Trust Network and can attest to the many innovative public/private partnerships between public schools and nonprofit experiential education providers that exist throughout the state that will grow and expand with the passage of LD 895. I can also attest to the fact that Maine is seen as a national leader in environmental education, conservation, innovative agriculture and outdoor schools and passage of LD 895 will increase that reputation nationwide.

Governor Janet Mills, in collaboration with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, & Forestry and the Maine Department of Education (DOE), has proclaimed 2025 as the "Year of Youth in Agriculture" to celebrate and empower young people in the agricultural sector, fostering the next generation of leaders through initiatives, partnerships, and engaging activities. Passing and funding Outdoor School for All Maine Students would be a perfect example of supporting the exciting public/private collaboration and education this is happening in Maine right now. In these times of change, getting more kids outside living & learning through multi-day, overnight experiential learning programs at Outdoor Schools like River Bend Farm is something everyone can get behind and feel good about.

I strongly urge this Committee to consider and pass LD 895 to support students across Maine having memorable Outdoor School experiential learning in agriculture, conservation & forestry.

Thank you, *Drew Dumsch*