



Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

April 25, 2025

RE: LD 1543: An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network

Dear Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Murphy, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Ania Wright and I am Maine Audubon's Policy Advocate. Maine Audubon fulfills our mission to "conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat" by engaging people of all ages in science-based education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1534, *An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network*. In addition to Maine Audubon's written testimony, please see the attached sign on letter representing support from 15 environmental, public health, and social justice organizations.

LD 1543 establishes the Maine Green Schools Network within the Department of Education (DOE) to support environmental education and initiatives in public schools. "Green Schools" as defined by the bill, are schools which show exemplary progress in building and infrastructure efficiency, enhancing environmental literacy, creating pathways for climate-ready jobs, and show commitment to building strong and lasting leadership to support these initiatives. The Network will support school projects, professional development, and development of common resources.

Education is at the heart of Maine Audubon's mission. We work every day with children and adults to foster environmental literacy so that they can become more informed and effective stewards of Maine wildlife and habitat. At the core of this work is our collaboration with classrooms, schools, and districts throughout the state, in which we align the exploration and appreciation of nature with predetermined learning outcomes and standards such as Next Generation Science Standards, Common Core, and Maine Learning Results.

Though we remain committed to this work in schools and districts strategic for Maine Audubon and our partners and supporters, it could be greatly enhanced and disseminated more broadly by establishing a Green Schools Network. Support and resources for teachers will help ensure that all

Maine youth and districts gain the additional perspective and tools they will need to tackle the environmental, economic, and social challenges they will inherit, while also instilling the pride and confidence that this place we now call Maine has what they need to thrive. The benefits of the Network will be numerous, and include:

1. Reduced Energy Use & Saving Taxpayer Dollars

Schools are major energy consumers in Maine. A Green Schools Network would improve operational efficiency, reduce utility costs, and ease financial strain on school budgets and local taxpayers.

2. Healthier Learning Environments

Sustainable infrastructure and healthier indoor spaces improve student and staff well-being, reduce absenteeism, and increase retention—making schools better places to learn and work.

3. Improved Educational Outcomes

Environmental and place-based education improves student performance, critical thinking, and engagement across all subjects—especially science, math, and literacy.

4. Workforce Development

The Green Schools Network will help prepare students for Maine’s growing clean energy, environmental science, and natural resource careers—meeting urgent workforce needs in high-demand fields.

5. Community and Environmental Impact

Schools are central to our communities. Sustainability initiatives not only benefit students, but also extend into the broader community—encouraging environmental stewardship and climate resilience.

6. Alignment with State Priorities

This bill supports Maine’s Climate Action Plan (*Maine Won’t Wait*), Maine’s Environmental Literacy Plan, and our Wabanaki Studies law—offering resources to integrate traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous perspectives into learning.

7. Equitable Access

A statewide network ensures that all schools, regardless of location or resources, can benefit from sustainability opportunities, partnerships, and shared learning.

Green School programs and networks are already thriving in other states. Florida’s Green School Designation Program¹ recognizes K-12 schools that voluntarily commit to conserving and protecting Florida’s natural resources. They are evaluated on communication and education, water conservation, waste reduction, energy efficiency, and air quality. As of 2024, 66 schools in Florida have

¹ floridadep.gov/osi/green-school-designation

received designations. **Maryland's Green School Program**,² established in 1999 and administered by the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE), recognizes schools that integrate environmental education into their curricula and implement sustainable practices. 654 schools – about 35% of Maryland's public and private schools – are certified as Maryland Green Schools. **Michigan's Green School Program**³ supports schools in achieving environmental goals through grant awards. **The Missouri Green School Program**⁴ is a tracking and recognition program similar to Maryland's program.

MAINE AUDUBON'S CURRENT "GREEN SCHOOLS" WORK

All of Maine Audubon's work with schools relates to the seven project types listed under "Network Duties" in the current bill language. Our work specifically addresses the connection between human infrastructure such as buildings, transportation, energy generation, and waste management and its impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat. We also strive to help teachers and students draw links between healthy ecosystems and the health and wellness of people and communities, and we see students benefit both physically and emotionally when learning experiences are experiential, outdoors, and designed to help students feel connected to their surroundings. In our view, strengthening a statewide network of schools and their partnerships to further impart and standardize these values and connections will significantly benefit Maine students and wildlife alike.

In our work with schools across a wide geographic and demographic spectrum, we are keenly sensitive to the financial, curricular, and other strains many districts and schools face. Many simply lack the resources to install new energy and HVAC systems, to build elaborate outdoor classroom structures, or develop irrigated food production beds most often associated with green schools. Instead, our work more often focuses on helping schools with limited budgets and management capacity to make outdoor learning, ecology, indigenous knowledge, and the green economy more accessible by creating programs, materials, and curricula that enable teachers to use their existing surroundings.

Historically, the majority of this work happens with elementary schools, where our mission closely aligns with standards around animal adaptations, plant and animal relationships, and how humans interact with the natural world. Maine Audubon leads fieldwork at nearby land trusts, creates developmentally appropriate field guides, and trains teachers in community science all across Maine. More recently, we also began work with Career and Technical Education Schools and teen enrichment

² marylandgreenschools.org/

³ www.michigan.gov/egle/public/egle-classroom/michigan-green-schools

⁴ meea.org/missouri-green-schools/participate/

programs to lead habitat restoration projects integrating ecologically-beneficial plants connected to Wabanaki Studies content into schoolyards and parks which classes can visit and study indefinitely without the burdens of ongoing maintenance.⁵ These efforts all directly advance the teaching and learning proposed in this bill without necessitating significant physical infrastructure or other investments by the participating schools and districts.

LD 1543 is not a mandate—it is an invitation. It offers a voluntary network for schools that want to lead the way in environmental responsibility, community connection, and educational innovation.

We urge you to vote in favor of LD 1543 and help make Maine a national leader in green schools, student empowerment, and sustainable communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ania Wright
Policy Advocate

⁵ See 'Restoring Ecological & Multicultural Connections in Portland Schoolyards' at maineaudubon.org/news/restoring-ecological-multicultural-connections-in-portland-schoolyards/

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RE: LD 1543 – An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong support for **LD 1543: An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network**. This bill represents a forward-thinking step to ensure that all Maine schools—regardless of size, location, or funding—have the tools and support needed to create healthier, more cost-effective, and environmentally sustainable learning environments.

Maine currently lacks a statewide “Green Schools Network,” putting us behind in coordinating energy efficiency improvements and environmental education. Housed within the Department of Education, this network would draw on the expertise of environmental, outdoor, climate, and youth organizations; state agencies; tribal governments; and other partners to advance environmental education and environmental sustainability in Maine schools. LD 1543 offers a cost-neutral, voluntary solution that empowers schools to work together, share best practices, and access critical resources and funding opportunities.

We endorse LD 1534 for the following key reasons:

1. **Reduced Energy Use & Saving Taxpayer Dollars**
Schools are major energy consumers in Maine. A Green Schools Network would improve operational efficiency, reduce utility costs, and ease financial strain on school budgets and local taxpayers.
2. **Healthier Learning Environments**
Sustainable infrastructure and healthier indoor spaces improve student and staff well-being, reduce absenteeism, and increase retention—making schools better places to learn and work.
3. **Improved Educational Outcomes**
Environmental and place-based education improves student performance, critical thinking, and engagement across all subjects—especially science, math, and literacy.
4. **Workforce Development**
The Green Schools Network will help prepare students for Maine’s growing clean energy, environmental science, and natural resource careers—meeting urgent workforce needs in high-demand fields.
5. **Community and Environmental Impact**
Schools are central to our communities. Sustainability initiatives not only benefit students, but also extend into the broader community—encouraging environmental stewardship and climate resilience.
6. **Alignment with State Priorities**
This bill supports Maine’s Climate Action Plan (*Maine Won’t Wait*), Maine’s Environmental Literacy Plan, and our Wabanaki Studies law—offering resources to integrate traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous perspectives into learning.

7. Equitable Access

A statewide network ensures that all schools, regardless of location or resources, can benefit from sustainability opportunities, partnerships, and shared learning.

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We urge you to vote in favor of LD 1543 and help make Maine a national leader in green schools, student empowerment, and sustainable communities.

Sincerely,

Maine Lakes
Third Act Maine
Sierra Club Maine
Maine Conservation Voters
passivHaus Maine
Defend Our Health
Center for an Ecology Based Economy
The Nature Conservancy in Maine

Momentum Conservation
Maine Environmental Education Association
Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine
Appalachian Mountain Club
Maine Health Professionals for Climate Action
Maine Audubon
Natural Resources Council of Maine



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow



Center for an
Ecology-Based
Economy



SIERRA CLUB
MAINE CHAPTER



Maine
Conservation
Voters



**Maine Health
Professionals
for Climate Action**

