



To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 25, 2025

From: Elise Hartill, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 1543: *"An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network."*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Elise Hartill, and I am the Director of Maine Youth for Climate Justice and the Co-Chair of the Climate Education Advocacy Working Group at the Nature Based Education Consortium (NBEC). NBEC is a Maine-based collaborative network of outdoor learning leaders and stakeholders working together to ensure that all Maine youth have access to powerful outdoor learning experiences. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1543, *"An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network."*

In 2022, our working group advocated for LD 1902, "A Resolve, To Establish a Pilot Program To Encourage Climate Education in Maine Public Schools." The bill was signed into law and funded with \$2.1 million.

I have been a part of this working group since then and have had the immense privilege of witnessing the impact of this pilot program, how it has given educators the tools they need to better serve their students. And how comprehensive climate education empowers students in the face of a changing climate, giving them a sense of agency and hope through interdisciplinary place- and project-based instruction.

Over the past 3 years, several key priorities consistently resonate among the diverse members of our network, from youth leaders, educators and stakeholders engaged across Maine's education system. So we set out to write a bill to address those needs, that bill is LD 1543, an Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network.

We didn't want to create a mandate, or something that would be a burden to educators & administrators, we wanted to create an ecosystem of resources and connected stakeholders. The Maine Green Schools Network will be a voluntary network of students, educators, administrators, and community organizations, administered by the Department of Education. Our vision for the network is to:

- Help educators and school administrators navigate the different resources and opportunities available at the state and federal level, including grants and programs to increase facility efficiencies;
- Direct educators to vetted, place-based climate education curriculum and resources;
- Empower students to lead and make tangible impacts on their school communities;
- Connect educators and students across the state who are doing related work;
- And celebrate students and educators for the work they're doing in their schools

In my work at NBEC and MYCJ, I get to witness and support the incredible youth working towards making their communities more sustainable and resilient to a changing climate in Maine. I also get to

work with educators, and am constantly in awe of their dedication to their students and making their schools and classrooms a better place to learn.

Throughout this hearing you will hear testimony from youth, educators and community partners detailing how this network will support their experiences at school, how “green schools” type projects are already happening across the state, and how much of a difference they make to the wellbeing of students and teachers alike.

LD 1543 would facilitate and celebrate their efforts towards a more sustainable and resilient Maine.

For these reasons and more, we encourage you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1543, *“An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network.”*

With gratitude,

Elise Hartill

NBEC Climate Education Advocacy Working Group Co-Chair

MYCJ Executive Director