

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Etta Hughes, 85 Edgecomb, Belfast, 04915
Date: April 25, 2025

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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Etta Hughes, I live in Belfast, and am a senior at the Ecology Learning Center, a public charter high school in Unity. I stand in strong support of the Green Schools Network Bill, L.D. 1543.

I have been blessed to have an education that ties me deeply to the place I am from, and that has led me to discover my passion for the natural world. After an early education that took me outside to learn about the balance of the ecosystems around me, I entered high school with a passion for learning and a deep connection to the landscapes in which I lived. I was saddened when I arrived to find so many of my peers already burnt out, closed down from education they had no connection to. I was lucky yet again that my public charter school does its best to incorporate environmental studies, fieldwork, canoeing and camping trips, and simply spending class time outside. For my environmental science class, we have taken part in state-wide amphibian species data collection, as well as helping collect and research data on tick borne diseases. Amazingly, my school has found that this type of education is not drastically more expensive and is thus entirely possible to implement while publicly funded. The empowerment that comes from doing real work with your hands is incredible, and I have watched it re-engage so many of my peers who had previously maintained little interest in schoolwork. As for me, classroom labs and data collection have left me with a thirst for learning, and a plan to pursue an environmental higher education so I can continue to be integrated in the Maine landscape that I have come to care about so deeply.

This bill would help students not only through their education, but also into their careers. Maine has the oldest median age of any state in the country. Young people leave in search of more job opportunities, and because they don't feel a connection to place. This bill could not only help create and support environmentally focused jobs, but could also help keep students in their home state.

We stand at a critical moment in human history. So often, I hear members of older generations tell me: "I have so much hope for the future with your generation taking the lead." I wish I could agree with them. But my generation has been raised in an age of technology. Many of my peers cannot look up from their phones long enough to have a good conversation. They have moved

through the motions of school and found no connection to it, or to the world around them. Anyone who does not learn about the problems that face our Earth in their education and does not see their place in their environment is not going to take the necessary action. At this moment, we need a generation of leaders prepared to face the challenges that the future holds. In my own short life, I have seen enough evidence to tell you that this bill will help to change and prepare the hearts and minds of so many young people. I encourage you to vote in favor of the Green Schools Network bill.

Thank you for your time, and for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,
Etta Hughes