



Joseph E. Rafferty
Senator, District 34

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Testimony of Senator Joe Rafferty
In Support of LD 1543, An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network
Before the Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
April 25th, 2025**

Representative Murphy, and esteemed colleagues of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee: I am Senator Joe Rafferty, and I represent Senate District 34, which includes Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, Berwick, North Berwick and Wells. I appreciate the opportunity to present LD 1543, *"An Act to Establish the Maine Green Schools Network."*

Throughout my years in the classroom and on the field, I witnessed the power of student-driven initiatives, hands-on learning, and the deep connection Maine students feel to their communities and the natural world. LD 1543 builds on that energy. It uplifts the incredible work already being done by our teachers and students to make schools greener, more efficient, and more engaging. This is not a top-down mandate—it is an opportunity. A voluntary network that opens doors for schools that want to lead, learn, and share.

LD 1543, as written, establishes the Maine Green Schools Network within the Department of Education (DOE) to support environmental education and initiatives in public schools. Under the bill, the DOE will administer the network, which will include various relevant stakeholders and government officials. The network will be responsible for supporting professional development and school projects; increasing the number of educators in the State who provide training for green schools; and for developing common resources, trainings, and metrics to support educators. It also authorizes the Department to develop a grant program to support the network in fulfilling its duties, and requires them to report back to the Legislature with findings and recommendations.

I have been in conversation with the Department of Education about amendments to this legislation that would ensure its compliance with current laws, and that it does not have a fiscal note. I would gladly amend the bill to include these changes at the work session.

Maine students and teachers are already taking initiative—whether by reducing waste in school cafeterias, growing food in outdoor classrooms, or leading energy audits of aging school buildings. LD 1543 recognizes and supports these efforts by connecting them across the state. It provides a structure that will allow best practices to flourish and resources to be shared, especially in rural and underserved schools that may not have the staff or funding to prioritize environmental programs on their own.

This bill is part of a much larger vision—one that aligns with our state's Environmental Literacy Plan as well as our Climate Action Plan. It offers our students not just knowledge, but purpose. It

gives them the tools to think critically, collaborate across disciplines, and take real, impactful action in their communities. These are the skills that will prepare them for the clean energy and environmental science careers Maine so urgently needs.

As an educator, I see how students thrive when given responsibility, leadership, and a chance to work toward something bigger than themselves. The Maine Green Schools Network does exactly that. It fosters leadership—among students, teachers, administrators, and community partners. It strengthens connections between schools and their surrounding communities. And it will save schools money in the long run by improving infrastructure and reducing energy costs.

In short, LD 1543 helps us build healthier, more cost-effective, and more sustainable schools—while also improving educational outcomes and inspiring the next generation of Maine leaders.

Let's give our schools the tools they need to continue leading the way. I respectfully urge this Committee to support LD 1543 and help us establish the Maine Green Schools Network.

Sincerely,

Senator Joe Rafferty
Senate District 34