



Friday April 24th, 2025

***Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs***

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

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

My name is Kaya Lolar, and I am the Policy Coordinator at the Maine Environmental Education Association (MEEA). I'm here to testify in support of LD 1543, An Act to Establish a Maine Green Schools Network. Thank you to Senator Rafferty and the bill's cosponsors for recognizing the importance of this initiative.

MEEA represents over 2,000 Maine educators—classroom teachers and community-based educators—who provide hands-on environmental and outdoor learning experiences for youth. Maine is a leader in outdoor education, but unlike other states, we lack a Green Schools Network to support sustainability projects in our schools. This bill would establish a Green Schools Network hosted by the Department of Education and would allow the DOE to collaborate with our network and other community based organizations to better support schools and teachers. Participation in the Maine Green Schools Network would be voluntary.

There are 7 key reasons why it is necessary to Establish a Green Schools Network in Maine and they are as follows:

- ❖ **Reducing Energy and Increasing Cost Savings** – Maine schools are major energy consumers. A Green Schools Network would help districts improve efficiency, lower energy costs, and reduce the financial burden on taxpayers.
- ❖ **Creating Healthier Learning Environments** – Improving air quality, reducing toxins, and incorporating sustainable infrastructure create safer, healthier spaces for students and staff, reducing absenteeism, increasing staff retention and improving well-being.
- ❖ **Stronger Education Outcomes** – Research shows that hands-on environmental learning enhances student achievement in core subjects, fosters critical thinking, and increases student engagement.

- ❖ **Workforce Development** – Preparing students for careers in sustainability, clean energy, natural resource, environmental, and conservation fields supports Maine's economy and future workforce needs.
- ❖ **Community & Environmental Impact** – Maine schools serve as community hubs, and sustainability efforts can extend beyond the classroom, fostering broader local resilience and environmental stewardship.
- ❖ **Alignment with State Goals** – Establishing this network is a named strategy in Maine's Environmental Literacy Plan and state Climate Action Plan, and aligns with Maine's commitment to ensuring Wabanaki Studies is taught in all schools by sharing resources and teacher training to support the incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge and Wabanaki perspectives.
- ❖ **Increasing Access** – A statewide network would ensure all schools, regardless of resources, have the support they need to implement sustainable practices and enrich student learning.

Being both a Wabanaki citizen and former student of the Maine public school system, I can speak to how powerful it would be to have a network dedicated to strengthening our education communities through ongoing efforts for environmental education.

For all these reasons, I urge you to support LD 1543, An Act to Establish a Maine Green Schools Network.