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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 Phoebe Williamson, and 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.

Among other things, I am a student at Freeport High School, a student representative to the RSU5 Board of Directors, and a youth advocate for the Green Schools Bill Team. I am here today because I care passionately about two things: education and the great State of Maine. While these things may seem unrelated, they are deeply connected and each cannot exist without the other. Without comprehensive and actionable climate education in our public schools, the beautiful place I have called home for each minute of my young life will cease to exist in the way we have come to love.

I'm sure many of you on the committee and the public can relate to my childhood of hiking in Baxter State Park, swimming in Casco Bay, and shopping at L.L.Bean for every season. Maine raised me, and from a young age, I was instilled with a deep love for the place I call home and a determination to take care of it by all means. The beauty of our state is changing before our eyes. The lobsters are moving north. The winters are shorter, snowfall is too inconsistent for skiing, and the coastline is eroding. I was still young when I learned this and I wanted to do whatever possible to be a part of the protection of the state. I founded an Earth club at my middle school, and by high school, I was passionate and knowledgeable about climate change in Maine. I joined a dual enrollment class with UNE about the Gulf of Maine and the challenges it faces because of warming water, ocean acidification, and invasive species. Through this educational opportunity, I learned that not only does climate change impact Maine's environment but also its economy and culture. The climate education I have been privileged to be a part of has taught me more than just scientific principles; it has taught me economic lessons, cultural awareness, critical thinking, and created a web of like-minded

community members. As a class, we have worked with Freeport's land trust, sea farmers, and local government to create real change in our community. This is the impact that actionable, personal, and comprehensive climate education has on students, educators, schools, and communities - an impact that can only grow with the passing of the Green Schools Bill.

By passing the Green Schools Bill, you ensure the creation of a network to support students, educators, and administrators by providing education to Maine students on how to understand and protect our state and providing opportunities for more of these positive impacts on students and communities. In doing so, you'll also send a clear message to Maine's youth: that you're listening, that you care, and that you're committed to protecting their future. That commitment, I believe, will lead to a brighter, greener future for *all* of us.