

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Will Lehan, 85 Mildred Ave, Bangor, ME, 04401
Date: April 25th, 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 Will Lehan. I am an educational technician at Orono High School, and I live in Bangor. I am testifying today in support of L.D. 1543, "An Act to Establish the Green Schools Network," because I believe Maine schools currently lack a consistent and collaborative framework to achieve their environmental education goals.

I have seen firsthand the benefits of schools embracing environmental education—whether through expanding curricula, reducing cafeteria food waste, or integrating time outdoors into the school day.

At Orono High School, our environmental club has led a successful composting initiative that now diverts tons of food waste from landfills each week. Our "Secret Garden" club has transformed an unused courtyard into a peaceful green space for students to connect with nature.

As a student at Bangor High School, our SEED Club took on a gardening challenge of their own, adding soil beds with edible cranberries, blueberries, and rhubarb to their courtyard.

These are amazing examples—but the reality is that schools are often doing this work in isolation, with little opportunity to share ideas or celebrate successes beyond school walls.

As an educator, I remain passionate about supporting students with their environmental projects. However, limited resources, funding, and time within an already full school week make it challenging to offer the level of support I'd like to.

We need a Green Schools Network to help ease that burden by providing shared resources and support for club advisors and educators.

My experience has shown me that without a Green Schools Network, Maine schools will also continue to duplicate efforts or miss out on implementing impactful composting systems, energy efficiencies, outdoor learning, and more.

It's no secret that many young Mainers are leaving the state in search of opportunities—but it doesn't have to be that way. By fortifying our Green Schools, we can harness the energy and creativity of our students. A network like this would not only deepen their learning, but also open doors to careers in agriculture, forestry, renewable energy, environmental science, and other fields tied to Maine's natural resources.

This bill was proposed, in part, by educators. But the passion from students across the state has been even more inspiring. They recognize the benefits of this network. I urge you to listen closely to their voices. The decisions you make today will shape their generation's education and generations' to come.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage you to support L.D. 1543. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Will Lehan