



**Testimony before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and
Agricultural, Conservation and Forestry Committee**

Neither for Nor Against LD 2212

" An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027"

February 27, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. I am submitting testimony neither for nor against LD 2212.

My name is Drew Dumsch, and I'm the President & CEO of The Ecology School at River Bend Farm, a nonprofit Outdoor School located in Saco and a member of the Maine Outdoor School for All Network, a state-wide collaboration of eight outdoor schools that for the past 16 years has offered multi-day overnight programs and provided over \$4 million in funding for thousands of students and classroom teachers throughout Maine.

Maine Outdoor School for All is seeking \$3 million from the State to supplement private funding for P.L. 2025, Chapter 84, also known as LD 895— An Act to Support Immersive Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program. Governor Mills signed LD 985 into law on May 23rd, 2025, with special revenue funds totaling just \$500 for this year and next.

LD 895 is an incredibly popular and strongly bi-partisan bill, passing unanimously in the Maine Senate 31-0 and in the Maine House with a vote of 113-1! This bill also has strong support from the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, the Maine Education Association, the Maine Environmental Education Association, Maine Conservation Voters, Maine School Boards Association, Maine School Superintendents Association, Educate Maine, and Maine Outdoor Brands.

Here are several key points to justify funding for this pilot project:

- **Outdoor School** programs should be for all – P.L. 2025, Chapter 84 creates equitable funding to provide youth development opportunities for students from grades 4-8 throughout the state, including rural and urban settings, tribal communities, and districts of all income levels.
- **Outdoor School** is uniquely effective for students in that:
 - o It is hands-on learning focused on science and conservation, natural resource management, climate change, agriculture, and Maine’s economy.
 - o It supports students’ mental health, social & emotional wellness, and improves teamwork, attendance, and retention rates.
 - o It builds leadership skills and promotes youth workforce development in STEM careers, agriculture, forestry, building trades, and energy sectors.

When LD 895 became law last spring, the Maine Outdoor School for All Network fundraised over \$500,000 from the private sector from foundations, philanthropists, and businesses. This private support allowed UMaine Cooperative Extension to form and pilot the *Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program* in 2025-2026. This past fall, Extension provided \$177,000 in partial grants to help send over 1,000 Maine students from 11 counties to inspiring, 3-day/2-night Outdoor School programs.

This demonstrates how the State of Maine investing \$3 million — \$1.5M in 2026-2027 and \$1.5M in 2027-2028 — into Extension's *Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program* is an innovative and efficient use of taxpayer dollars, and it sends a powerful message to our private funders that you, our elected representatives, are deeply committed to providing children throughout Maine the experiential, outdoor education they very much need and deserve.

\$3 million will fully fund the Outdoor School programs in Maine for over 7,000 students over the next two years and fund UMaine Extension’s administrative costs, including grant distribution, running a state-wide advisory group, and conducting an in-depth evaluation on the impact of Outdoor Schools on youth development in Maine.

I’d like to thank you all for your committees’ thoughtful deliberation as you prioritize the final supplemental state budget. I ask that you prioritize future youth development in Maine by including funding for *Outdoor School for All* in the supplemental budget.

Thank you,



Drew Dumsch. President/CEO

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