

April, 2023

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

Testimony in *Support* of LD 1682 An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Howard Tuttle, and I am the Superintendent of Sheepscot Regional School Unit 12. I am writing to support the passage of LD 1682, An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program. I would like to thank Representative Shaw for introducing this crucial legislation.

For the past five years, RSU 12 has partnered with FoodCorps, a national non-profit organization that collaborates with schools across 13 states to provide experiential learning opportunities related to food, cooking, and gardening. Through this partnership, FoodCorps has helped us provide hands-on lessons to excite students about consuming fruits and vegetables and supported the school nutrition staff in providing nourishing meals. The RSU 12 School Board envisions providing students with the knowledge to make healthy food choices and understand the importance of local whole foods and where these foods come from. It is widely recognized that people of all ages learn best through hands-on activities. Most individuals, especially children, learn through movement.

Experiential learning is highly effective for students of all ages, as it engages their bodies and minds. RSU 12 educators and community members have called for less time at desks and more outdoor, tactile, and movement-based learning opportunities. However, there are barriers to implementing experiential education, primarily related to capacity and funding. Staffing for experiential education is not included in the state subsidy for education formula and grant programs are rare, competitive, and short-lived. Ongoing Professional development for educators is also critical in order to build and effective program.

LD 1682 creates a grant program to help schools cover the costs of initiating and implementing experiential education programs. This is critical, as funding has been a major barrier for many schools in initiating and implementing experiential education programs. With this program, schools will be able to access funding to cover the costs of materials, training, and staff to start and implement experiential education programs.

Moreover, the bill also includes provisions for reporting and evaluation, ensuring that the grant program is transparent and accountable. This will help to ensure that the program is effective and that schools are able to make the most of the resources that are available to them.

Overall, LD 1682 is a well-crafted and necessary piece of legislation that will help to provide Maine students with the experiential education opportunities they need to thrive. By providing support and resources to schools, LD 1682 will help to break down the barriers that have prevented many schools from initiating and implementing experiential education programs. By doing so, Maine students will be better prepared to succeed in the 21st century economy and will

be better equipped to make informed choices about their health and well-being.

As the Superintendent of Sheepscot Regional School Unit 12, I have seen firsthand the benefits of experiential education. Our partnership with FoodCorps has helped to provide our students with hands-on learning opportunities that have deepened their understanding of food and nutrition. We have seen the positive effects of these programs on our students' behavior, mental health, and academic performance. I am confident that with the passage of LD 1682, more schools in Maine will be able to provide their students with similar opportunities.

In conclusion, I urge the members of the Maine Legislature to support LD 1682. This bill is a critical investment in the future of Maine's students and will help to ensure that they are prepared to succeed in the 21st century economy. Our kids and teachers need this tool to help with learning and development. Our board is eager to see experiential learning continue. I hope you will vote ought to pass on LD 1682. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and I will do my best to provide any additional information you may require. I am happy to be of service when you discuss this bill in the work session.

Sincerely,

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RSU 12

LD 1682

Written testimony only