

Jeffery Chick
Steuben
LD 1881

Hi, my name is Jeffery Chick from Harrington Elementary School in Harrington, Maine, where I am a science and social teacher for grades 4 through 6.

I am writing to testify in opposition to LD 1817 An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.

The exclusive focus on overnight experiences in this bill is of concern for 2 reasons:

1) These overnight experiences, while important, especially from a social-emotional development perspective, must be complemented with regular outdoor learning experiences close to home—like the ones my organization engages in as part of a collaboration with other non-profit, governmental, and for-profit organizations in our area. Failure to engage children regularly outdoors in their home communities has actually been shown to negatively impact students' sense of the environmental and cultural significance of their own home area, potentially leading to kids growing up and leaving the area, and making them think of outdoor experiences as isolated adventures, not a part of everyday life.

2) Overnight opportunities disproportionately benefit the more populated, affluent communities in southern Maine and the coast, where most of these facilities exist. If you work with children under the age of 4th grade, this bill also would not support their outdoor learning so that may be something to add too.

Also, I have had outdoor organizations come to our school to assist in teaching valuable lessons in ecology. To think that the bill would limit funding to only those who participate in overnight activities would take away many opportunities for other children. We have had many great lessons and outdoor opportunities for all grades at our school and for other children in our district.

If this bill were amended to more broadly encompass the breadth of outdoor and environmental education opportunities and providers our students have access to across the state, I would gladly consider supporting it.

Thank you,
Jeffery H. Chick