

Statement of Support to LD 1817

An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program May 10, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the distinguished Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Jessie Francis I live in the town of Stockton Springs. I am submitting testimony as a Mainer, a former camper, staff person and current board member of the University of Maine 4-H Camps at Tanglewood and Blueberry Cove; I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1817.

Teachers and schools would benefit from LD 1817; coming out of the pandemic there are significant needs of teachers and schools and the children they serve. This initiative would provide additional supports and hands-on learning opportunities for teachers and schools.

Children and students would benefit from LD 1817; who participate in outdoor education programs have improved academic performance, increased self-esteem and confidence, better problem-solving skills, and improved physical and mental health. And, unfortunately, despite Maine's rich outdoor resources, many Maine students are not able to access outdoor education and its benefits. This initiative would reduce the inequalities in Maine students' access to outdoor recreation and learning experiences and drive improved student outcomes.

The broader Maine community will benefit from LD1817; the program will stimulate economic growth through adding full-time job opportunities and generating life-long supporters of Maine's outdoor and tourism industries; Oregon authorized a similar program nearly a decade ago which supported numerous jobs, educators, and stimulated significant economic activity.

I began attending Tanglewood 4-H Learning Center in 2000 as a child and continued working for the organization for years, seasonally and then full-time for more than 10 years. I have served on the Board of Directors of the same organization since 2013. My commitment to the organization is a testament to the impact that outdoor education has had on my life as a child and young adult. I have had the joy of teaching hundreds of children in the Maine outdoors—nothing compares to standing beside a child as they eat a carrot fresh from the ground for the first time, watching a nine-year-old observe as a monarch butterfly emerges from a chrysalis in real time, or being with a student as they dip their feet in the ocean for the first time, despite living their entire life in a state with 3,000+ miles of ocean coastline. These experiences enhance traditional classroom learning and builds lifelong commitment to Maine's natural resources.

For these reasons, I would ask you to support LD 1817 and vote ought to pass on his bill. Thank you to the sponsor for bringing forward this bill and thank you to the committee members for your work on this Committee.