

Alison Johnson  
Birch Harbor  
LD 1817

Hi, my name is Alison Johnson from Island Readers & Writers in Southwest Harbor, Maine, where I am a Director of School Programs.

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.

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,  
Alison Johnson