



Maine Education Association

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Testimony In Support of

LD 1817 An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry May 10, 2023

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

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of MEA in support of LD 1817 An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.

During the early months and especially the first year of the COVID pandemic, many schools turned to outdoor spaces for holding classes as an alternative to the need for masking while indoors in order to reduce transmission of the virus. As a result, many educators not only located classes outdoors, but incorporated the setting as part of the lesson. The public at large became more aware of the importance of spending time in nature and the many benefits of doing so for our mental and physical wellbeing.

We are fortunate to live in an incredibly beautiful state. Every time I get to travel to other parts of Maine I am struck by the natural beauty of our surroundings, and I am reminded of the importance of doing what we can to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change in order to try to preserve Maine's natural beauty.

Some students in Maine are also fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in outdoor education programs, and to learn about and appreciate our environment. My school district for many years provided such an opportunity to all seventh graders. My own daughters enjoyed the experience when they were students.

Unfortunately, not all students in our state have that opportunity, for a variety of reasons. The proposal before you in LD 1817 will expand the opportunity to many more students and help to reduce the current inequitable situation. There is a considerable cost to what is proposed, and that is a concern for us, given the many other priorities MEA is hoping to see progress on during this session. But we are hopeful that these priorities can be met as well as the other important proposals before the legislature that will help to improve the education as well as the lives of our students and that will help to address the issues of the educator shortages.

We hope you will consider voting "ought to pass" on LD 1817.

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