



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony in Support of
“An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All
Maine Students Program”

Before the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
May 15, 2023

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

My name is Kathleen Meil and I serve as Senior Director of Policy & Partnerships at Maine Conservation Voters. Our organization represents more than 13,000 members and supporters dedicated to protecting Maine’s environment and our democracy. Today, that means testifying in support of LD 1817, “An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.”

A few days at one of Maine’s outdoor learning centers can be transformative for middle school students, providing hands-on, holistic, interdisciplinary learning focused on science and nature, and connecting outdoor recreation with environmental stewardship, natural resource management, and Maine’s economy. Students build self-sufficiency and leadership skills through the healthy challenges that come with an outdoor living experience, and schools participating in Outdoor School programs report improvements in attendance and retention rates. At a time when so many of our young people struggle with overwhelming isolation and mental health challenges, outdoor school experiences outside the traditional classroom allow students and teachers to see each other in a new light, building trust and strong relationships.

Earlier this year, Maine Conservation Voters hosted leaders from the Maine Outdoor School For All campaign for a virtual Lunch & Learn. (You can view the recording [here](#).) After hearing about outdoor schools, the national momentum around nature-based education, and the promise of LD 1817, one participant commented, “*There really isn’t a case against outdoor schools, is there?*” **Yet fewer than a quarter of Maine middle school students have the opportunity to connect with our natural heritage through an outdoor school program.**

LD 1817 would support all students in 4th through 8th grades to spend two nights and three days at an outdoor learning center and ensure that the experience would be integrated with school curriculum and aligned with state learning standards so we can get children outside connecting with Maine's outdoor heritage. Students, teachers, and our entire community would benefit from equitably extending this powerful experience to all Maine students. For these reasons, Maine Conservation Voters supports LD 1817 and respectfully urges you to vote "ought to pass."

Thank you.

Kathleen Meil
Senior Director of Policy and Partnerships
Maine Conservation Voters