

## **Testimony in Support of 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 distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Susan Swanton, I'm a resident of Biddeford, the retired Executive Director of the Maine Marine Trades Association and proud to serve on the Board of Directors of The Ecology School in Saco, and as Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Landing School of Boatbuilding and Design in Arundel.

I am so delighted that via LD 1817 Maine has an opportunity to give students the chance to not only enjoy some fun outdoors, but to have their time spent at an environmental learning center be a living and learning experience that has the potential to be life changing. You may think that my post-employment 'work' – serving on these two boards seems a little disjointed. But actually, they are quite connected. In my 40 years in the boating industry I spent a lot of time working outdoors in boatyards and marinas and on the water. For the last 20 years of that career most of my work was focused on environmental compliance and education and training. These two things became my passions as I realized that we all have a job to do when it comes to protecting our environment and I could help make that happen by connecting my industry to resources at the state and federal levels that would help us do the right things. And on the educational front, as someone who was responsible for hiring people and then someone who worked for a large number of employers I knew that one of our biggest problems has always been a lack of a trained workforce.

I have long believed that everyone should have work that they can be passionate about – not just a job that pays the bills. In all honesty, my career was a bit of an accident. No one told me there were opportunities like the ones I found – or perhaps more accurately, stumbled upon. But that accidental stumble into my local boatyard changed my life and provided me with experiences and relationships that I never would have had if I had taken a more traditional career path. This bill, when enacted, will give so many Maine kids an opportunity to learn and grow and perhaps see for themselves that if they have the passion they too can find what I found - work that makes their hearts sing. Careers that will pay well, that offer good benefit packages and that will give these young people something to be proud of right here at home and that don't necessarily require the expense of four years at a university are there for the taking. In fact, the commitment beyond high school might be just a year or two at a community college – yes like The Landing School, or an apprenticeship program or simply by working for an employer who has a strong commitment to training. And there's something else we should all be grateful for – working in the outdoor recreation industries in Maine can't be 'offshored' or done remotely.

As you consider this bill I hope that you will see what Sen. Brenner and the one hundred and thirteen co-sponsors who joined her saw – a real opportunity to improve the lives of every young student in Maine by giving them the chance to experience the wonders of the outdoors, to learn by doing, and to enjoy the company of others as they share farm fresh meals and living experiences that they just can't get in a classroom. I thank you for your time and ask that you fully support LD 1817 with a vote of ought to pass.