



**Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director**

**In support of**

***LD 1817 An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All  
Maine Students Program***

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club, pleased to speak in support of LD 1817.

AMC is the nation's oldest conservation, recreation and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We own 100,000 acres of forestland in Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use, including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation and environmental education.

Since 2012 AMC has become a committed partner with local teachers, schools, and other youth providers to engage K-12 students from Piscataquis County in meaningful outdoor environmental education experiences that enhance academic achievement and tie into Maine's curriculum frameworks.

AMC began our Maine Woods Community Youth and Environment Program (MWCYEP) to help meet the need for science education. According to a 2018-2019 district report card for one of our partners, Penquis Valley High School, only 36.5% of all 8th graders scored "at or above state expectations" on science; by high school, that percentage had dropped to 28.1%.

Despite residents' proximity to the spectacular 100-Mile Wilderness, many Piscataquis County students have little experience connecting with the area's unique natural resources. Today's youth—future stewards of the environment—must develop a genuine connection to the natural world coupled with a fact-based understanding of the natural environment and issues concerning resource use. Disconnection between youth and nature has significant implications for the region's future. Piscataquis County's history and economic health hinge in part upon local residents' active engagement with, and understanding of, the outdoors and the opportunities of a natural resource-based economy.

Our educational and career aspirations programs, carried out in cooperation with local schools and the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District, have succeeded in making students aware of careers that they could choose without leaving Maine. One former student, after participating in our programming, now is studying forestry at the University of Maine. Who knows—maybe he'll come to work at AMC?

We believe that all Maine students deserve the opportunity to learn about the world around them in an immersive, hands-on way. We strongly support the creation of the Outdoor School for All Program.