



May 10, 2023

Honorable Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Alicia Heyburn, and the Executive Director of Teens to Trails, an organization that connects Maine youth with outdoor experiences. Today, I offer testimony in support of LD 1817, An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.

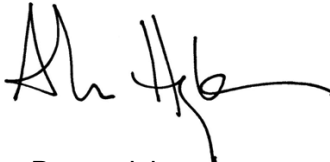
We support co-curricular outdoor programs at 68 schools across Maine and consistently hear from teachers that group outdoor experiences like hiking, camping and outdoor skills like building fires and learning about the natural world around us bring immense mental health benefits, like joy, social connection, purpose and pride. Imagine if these were freely available to EVERY middle school student as part of their educational experience!

These programs, often offered as a club, are RARELY funded in a school budget and they are tenuous - reliant on one teacher's willingness to expand their responsibilities beyond the classroom. Yet they are life changing, and should be a guaranteed aspect of our youth's education!

Ample research shows that spending time in nature has a significant positive impact on mental wellbeing, particularly for those who feel isolated or lonely. The opportunity to immerse in the outdoors with classmates, teachers and trained facilitators is establishing positive bonds with nature and greater chances of respect and protection of our environment, and equally important positive relationships with the peers and adults who share the experience. In person meaningful connections generate compassion and care.

We strongly urge the committee to support LD1817 to ensure that Maine's youth have access to the awe-inspiring natural world we inhabit.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, 

Alicia Heyburn, Brunswick
Teens to Trails, Executive Director

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