

Testimony of Alexandra B. Argo in Support of LD 156

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Alexandra Argo. I am a resident of Portland and a parent of a fifth grader at Longfellow Elementary School.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 156 "An Act to Require Outdoor Recess Time For Students From Grade 6 To Grade 8".

As a parent of rising sixth grader, I am concerned about the lack of outdoor time the schoolday will provide as she transitions into middle school, and how this will impact our children mentally, socially and academically.

I have always known my child to benefit greatly from unstructured outdoor time. During the pandemic, when we were homeschooling, it became clear that even as little as twenty minutes of outdoor fresh air, prior to her studies, allowed her to be more focused and well behaved for structured academics. In fact, a clinical report from the American Academy of Pediatrics states that regular increments of outdoor time enhances brain development, improves mental focus and promotes executive function in adolescents.

Additionally, our child, like many children after the pandemic, has struggled to navigate and manage anxiety. We have found that regular outdoor activity has been one of the most effective measures in managing her anxiety symptoms. I do not believe this is anecdotal to my own child. It is obvious that school age children have been greatly impacted by the disruption of the pandemic. It is my belief that recess would be greatly beneficial to the mental health of Maine's children.

A need for physical movement does not reduce once a child leaves elementary school. In Portland middle schools specifically, bullying and behavioral issues have been a huge issue recently. It is my belief that providing more outdoor opportunities for children to play and be outdoors, could foster community and help the children to process the stress of their social, emotional and academic expectations, and give them a healthy outlet for their energy.

Maine is a state that prides itself on an abundance of natural beauty and outdoor opportunities. One does not need to go to the mountains or the forest to play in the golden leaves of autumn or frolic in the snow in winter. Children only need opportunities to interact with Maine's nature to foster appreciation and respect for this beautiful state and become stewards of its future.

Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, I thank you, the co-chairs and committee for your time and commitment to Maine's children. I am happy to answer any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Alexandra B. Argo
Portland