



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of:
LD 156: An Act to Require Outdoor Recess Time for Students from Grade 6 to Grade 8**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Room 208, Cross State Office Building
Thursday, February 9, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brenner, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association.

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

This bill would require schools to provide at least 20 minutes of outdoor recess for students in grades 6-8, no fewer than 3 days per week. MPHA is in support of this bill.

Data show that being physically active is important for healthy growth and development. Physical activity during childhood is associated with numerous physical and mental health benefits, including obesity prevention, and improved bone health, self-worth, and social engagement. [According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), engaging in physical activity may also help improve students' academic performance, such as academic achievement and grades, academic behavior (e.g., time on task), and other factors that influence academic achievement (e.g., concentration, memory, and attentiveness in the classroom).

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that school-age children engage in 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day; 30 minutes of which should be achieved during the school day (Institute of Medicine). The school-based recommendation is based in part on the role that schools play in health promotion for our children. In Maine, schools are uniquely situated to influence the health of thousands of youth, across races, ethnicities, ages, genders, and weight statuses. Resources, such as playgrounds, sporting equipment, and safe spaces to run and play are not available to all children during their out-of-school time. Accordingly, schools' physical activity programs and policies create opportunities that provide equitable reach of physical activity, regardless of children's demographic factors.

Physical *in*activity is a key determinant of childhood obesity and health disparities throughout the life-course. Standardized testing requirements and budget cuts may contribute to declines in school-based physical activity opportunities. It is due to these challenges, that the Institute of Medicine recommends a "whole-of-school"

approach in which recess, in-class activity breaks, and integration of physical activity with the classroom curriculum are highlighted as action areas to increase time spent in MVPA.

We are supportive of efforts to increase physical activity opportunities for schoolchildren throughout the school day, and respectfully request you to vote LD 152 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for considering our testimony.