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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee  
On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5525

As a former high school school counselor married to a middle school science teacher, I experienced the transformative powers of Outdoor School for both student leaders and participants.

Many of my high school students left for their first Outdoor School week anticipating a fun break from the school routine, but they returned as leaders with heightened commitments to their environment. After their first student leader experience they applied each season to return.

My husband has taken many groups of 6th graders on their maiden Outdoor School voyage, and most poignantly shared stories of teary-eyed children struggling to leave their homes for the first time. These same children also cried on the bus ride home after their Outdoor School experience - because they didn't want to leave it behind.

Many children experience nature for the first time at Outdoor School, and develop an understanding of their critical relationship to it. They take ownership of their earth in a way they hadn't before. Perhaps as importantly, they experience friendship and bonding with their peers - some for the first time. The Outdoor School program nurtures community building as carefully as it does environmental education.

There is a certain magic that takes place at Outdoor School, and it should be available to all students throughout the state, regardless of income levels or accessibility to funding sources.

At a time when our planet becomes more and more strained, Outdoor School is a critical catalyst to creating environmental stewards.

My husband had to return home in the middle of the night, mid-week into an Outdoor School stint, for the birth of our daughter back in 2005. My husband and I support ODS financially, but we know it takes a lot more than individual donations to create a sustainable, stable program that will truly thrive.

Thank you for your support of HB 5525.

Wendy & Ward Ferguson  
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