

My name is Pamela M. Proulx-Curry, I live in Old Town. This testimony is in reference to LD 1573.

As the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Campus Compact, a small nonprofit organization associated with institutions of higher education I oversaw a 36 member AmeriCorps\*VISTA program which placed AmeriCorps volunteers in communities (both rural and urban) throughout the state of Wisconsin. As the Academic Dean at Eastern Maine Community College, I helped to design and oversee a 12 member AmeriCorps program which provided wrap-around support services to low-income individuals in the greater Bangor area with the goal of helping them achieve economic stability.

In both capacities I had the opportunity to observe firsthand the role that AmeriCorps programs can play in helping move communities to greater social and economic stability. I have witnessed dramatic increases in student performance and success at all K-12 levels due to AmeriCorps tutoring and mentoring programs. I have seen measurable reductions in prison recidivism due to an AmeriCorps re-entry program. I have seen a boost in food-security in communities where AmeriCorps members helped build community gardens while establishing food pantries and nutrition education programs. Whether in poor urban neighborhoods or in resource strapped rural communities, the AmeriCorps activity, almost without fail, results in significant positive impacts for the communities served.

AmeriCorps is able to achieve these results because of the generous and committed individuals who dedicate a year (sometimes more) of their lives to service to their country. In return they receive a stipend that allows them to survive at poverty level in the community they are serving (e.g. the living allowance for VISTA volunteers this year, before social security tax deductions, ranges from \$675.08 biweekly in most of the state to \$791.70 biweekly in the greater Portland area). You can imagine the challenges this poses for meeting just basic needs for housing and food. Rent alone, even a studio or room, can eat up half or more of the month's income leaving precious little for food, transportation, and other basic needs. With rent prices soaring and food prices going up as well, it has become increasingly difficult to attract good candidates to fill the volunteer positions. Young people from well-off families who can provide additional support are able to serve, but many low income individuals simply cannot afford to do so.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency that oversees the AmeriCorps programs, attempts to make the prospect more appealing by offering the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award upon completion of the service year. That award currently stands at \$6895 and can be applied to either government guaranteed student loans or can be paid to a college or university to cover direct educational expenses (e.g. tuition, books, etc.). Considering that tuition alone at the various Maine University system campuses ranges from \$7350 - \$9,240, one can see that the AmeriCorps education award does not go far.

LD 1573 proposes to make service in AmeriCorps a little more attractive and affordable by including a check-box on employment applications that would let employers know that the applicant had devoted at least a year of their life to serving their country (similar to the Veteran check off) thus allowing for some extra consideration for that service, as well as exempting the education award from Maine income taxes. The impact of the exemption would be negligible for the State of Maine, but significant on an individual basis. It would also send a message to past and potential AmeriCorps members, and to employers in the state, about the value the State places on their service.

For these reasons, I urge you to support LD 1573.