

Testimony In Favor on LD 143: An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism

Good Morning Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Luke Shorty and I reside in Winthrop, Maine and am the chair-elect of Volunteer Maine, Maine's Commission for Community Service.

I come to you today to support LD 143, An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism. The Maine Service Fellows Program that was established in statute by the last legislature is designed to help Maine be more responsive to volunteerism in small communities. These organizations tend to not have the capacity to successfully be awarded or manage federal Americorp funds. It is not uncommon in Volunteer Maine to see organizations who desperately need the human capacity to serve their rural communities, not be successful in obtaining these volunteers who could make such a difference in some of our most needed communities in Maine.

I lived in Aroostook County for a dozen years as the Executive Director of the Maine School of Science and Mathematics and in Northern Penobscot County as the Executive Director of Lee Academy. Both these organizations served families in communities that were in some of the most rural areas of the State of Maine. Many times, as a school administrator, I often thought to myself, how nice it would be to have a group of volunteers who could help out with capacity needs in after school activities, community initiatives, and much needed food pantries. This was just about the needs of our students. Think about what volunteers could do in other much needed rural issues. They could gather data for where there is lack of broad band access or help much needed emergency services find more efficient ways to serve the vast stretch of land they serve in rural Maine.

I know from firsthand experience how powerful service can be to our economy and our environment. I served two terms in the Maine Conservation Corp working on trails as far north as White Cap in the 100-mile wilderness, and parks such as Camden State Park and Acadia National Park. Volunteerism also helped me hone my leadership skills as a senior team leader on multiple trail crews. I also developed a strong professional network that continues to serve me to this day. It speaks to how volunteerism is a win-win situation both for the organization that uses volunteers and for the volunteers themselves as they build networks and skill that can help them as they transition from service into the workforce. Many of which end up working in the communities that they served.

This bill would fund for two years the ability to have 15 Maine Service Fellows serve some of the most rural communities that could benefit the most from a volunteer working to help build a stronger capacity where they are needed most.

I thank you for your time today in allowing me to speak on behalf of service and on how this bill will help bolster our economy in Maine while also addressing State concerns regarding climate change. I will gladly answer any questions and or comments you may have at this time to the best of my ability.

Sincerely,

Luke Shorty
Winthrop, Maine