



Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service
A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism



January 31, 2023

TO: The Honorable Joseph Rafferty
The Honorable Michael Brennan
and
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: Maryalice Crofton, Executive Director

RE: LD 143 *An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism*

The bill referenced above is most likely your first introduction to the Maine Service Fellows program and its connection to Volunteer Maine. Because it is several years since the Commission had legislation in front of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, it seems a re-introduction should be first.

The Maine Commission for Community Service, now doing business as Volunteer Maine, was created in 1994 and its responsibilities appear in 5 MRSA chapter 373. Our legislative oversight committee is State and Local Government which is why Volunteer Maine bills do not routinely come to this committee. Yet, when the Department of Education became the Commission's fiscal agent in 2012 on the closure of State Planning Office, our budget moved and that is what brings the Commission before you now.

For nearly 30 years, the Commission has built capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer and service communities by funding programs, developing managers of volunteers, raising awareness of issues impacting the community volunteer sector, and promoting service as a strategy to tackle local challenges. As prescribed in federal and state law, those challenges must be related to public safety, health and human services, environmental stewardship, education, and economic opportunity.

The funding granted to community agencies and municipalities predominantly has been from a federal agency that funds AmeriCorps. This national service program has benefited Maine tremendously but has not successfully nor consistently been able to help rural areas in the state. The Commission even offered a micro-sized program (2-5 members) for rural agencies in the hopes the scale would be more suitable. What could not be altered were the federal administrative regulations. Ultimately, 4 of 7 rural-sized AmeriCorps grants ending prematurely because the micro-sized agencies were overwhelmed by the requirements. Two of these agencies even testified in support of LD 1010 which created the Maine Service Fellows in the 130th Legislature.

LD1010 *An Act to Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program* was introduced, heard and supported by members of the 130th's Committee on State and Local Government, and enacted in 2021.

- It is a state service corps that can remain focused on the needs of rural Maine communities as federal interests change and it is more flexible administratively so that smaller organizations can participate.
- It responds to the research finding ("Philanthropy's Blind Spot," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2021) that rural communities are not accessing resources and supports because they do not have the human capacity to search out, apply for, or manage the assistance while larger communities do.
- It was designed with direct advice of rural nonprofits, municipal and county leaders, and funders working in the rural areas of Maine. Communities will define the issue, goals, and develop the work plan for a Service Fellow who will commit to a year of service in each locale.
- It acknowledges the national data showing older teens and young adults have a very high interest in community engagement but there are not sufficient quality opportunities through which they can serve.

- People who volunteer for an intense term of service in a community set deep roots in that community. In Maine, 25% of the young adults who move here to do a year of community service, remain and make Maine their home. Service attracts talent.
- Research showing service is a pathway to employment is verified by the fact 7 of 10 Maine national service members report they made connections during service that helped their future careers and/or employment.
- Formal service programs leverage additional resources while strengthening local connections. Even during the pandemic years, Maine AmeriCorps programs leveraged \$3 for each \$1 of grant funds awarded.
- Requested program funding only supports the individual who serves. The costs of recruitment, supervision, training, materials or supplies are covered by other funding sources.

In LD1010, the Maine Service Fellows program is directed to

- Increase the opportunities for individuals to devote a year of service to communities in the State;
- Attract to and retain in the State motivated adults who have completed a college degree within the prior 5 years to serve in positions where they can apply skills and abilities to projects that benefit Maine citizens;
- Provide rural and underserved communities in the State a resource to address critical health and human, public safety, education and environmental needs; and
- Strengthen civic engagement of both the program fellows and community residents through solutions based in whole or in part in volunteer service.
- Whether a community qualifies as rural is determined using the USDA rural-urban continuum codes. For Maine, areas qualifying would be in Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington. Towns in Penobscot County that are outside the Greater Bangor region and have populations under 5,000 are also eligible to participate.

LD1010's passage is not the end of the story.

In the second session of the 130th, LD 1974 *An Act To Establish and Fund the Maine Climate Corps Program Pursuant to Recommendations in the Report Required by Resolve 2021, Chapter 25* was heard and supported by the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. Although the bill was focused on creation of the Maine Climate Corps, assigning the corps to the Commission, and funding it, LD974 identified a role for Maine Service Fellows in helping rural communities develop resiliency plans.

- LD1974 proposed \$250,000 to support a small group of Service Fellows to help rural areas.
- \$30,000 was appropriated to support one person.

LD143 would support 15 Maine Service Fellows who could work across any of the areas originally specified. Communities could tackle substance use, housing, domestic violence, and more.

In the call for applications issued in Fall 2022, three proposals were submitted.

- Millinocket for assistance with community decisions and plans related to economic development.
- Pleasant Point (Sipayik) for coordinating a community home weatherizing project.
- A coalition of 10 Washington County ambulance associations for leading a revitalization of EMS volunteers. (Only 2 of the 10 can respond on a 24/7 basis.)

The Commission did limited outreach, knowing **79 communities qualify and 20 had expressed interest** at the Maine Municipal Conference in October. One private donation means two Service Fellows can be placed in Spring 2022. Millinocket and Pleasant Point (Sipayik) are the first ready to recruit.

Hopefully, this background informs your deliberations and I will be available to answer any questions or provide further information you may need.



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LD143 – How \$570,00 Is Figured Maine Service Fellows Support for Individual

\$28,334 Maine Service Fellows living allowance (212% of poverty; 11 months)
2,575.80 monthly living allowance (LA)

4,620 Health insurance via Corps Network group (\$420/mo)

99 Worker comp/in-service accident or injury (0.35% of LA)

2,168 FICA/Medicare (7.65% of LA)

\$33,053 TOTAL

5,667 educational loan payment on completion of service

38,720 FULL TOTAL

\$38,000.00 pp requested in bill (\$570,000/15)

1/23/2023

Sponsors of LD 1010 which created Maine Service Fellows.



130th MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2021

Legislative Document

No. 1010

H.P. 748

House of Representatives, March 10, 2021

An Act To Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program

Reference to the Committee on State and Local Government suggested and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. B. Hunt".

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative RIELLY of Westbrook.
Cosponsored by Senator BALDACCI of Penobscot and
Representatives: CARLOW of Buxton, CLOUTIER of Lewiston, Speaker FECTEAU of
Biddeford, MATLACK of St. George, RISEMAN of Harrison, WARREN of Scarborough,
Senator: MOORE of Washington.

Fall 2022 Info flyer for communities. Same info is on VolunteerMaine.gov.



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Maine Service Fellows

Mission

- The mission of the Maine Service Fellows program is to:
- Provide rural, underserved communities with a resource to address critical needs;
- Increase the opportunities for recent college graduates to devote a year of service to communities and use their skills to make a difference;
- Attract and retain people with a passion for public service, especially in rural areas; and
- Strengthen civic engagement and community resilience by involving community residents as well as Service Fellows in volunteer-based solutions.



Overview

The Maine Service Fellows program was formed to help rural communities by assigning someone to devote full-time effort to a critical need. It recognizes that some communities need one more set of hands to accomplish local goals. Qualified organizations apply to Volunteer Maine to sponsor a Service Fellow in an eligible community. The sponsor should be prepared to support the Service Fellow for up to 2 years.

Service Fellows devote full-time effort (1,800 hours/12 mos) to examining and understanding the need, exploring solutions, and engaging citizens in identifying and implementing the solution. They live in the community and serve through a sponsor organization that is responsible for providing supervision, connections, and the essential materials or tools to accomplish the approved work plan.

What is a Service Fellow?

Maine Service Fellows commit to serve the needs of a rural Maine community, Maine Service Fellows wants to meet you!

In addition to honing skills, knowledge, and abilities, serving as a Fellow is an opportunity to

- Explore public and nonprofit careers
- Develop a professional network
- Demonstrate your ability to have an impact on a specific issue
- Immerse oneself in the year-round life of a Maine community
- Make an authentic difference

Eligible individuals need to

- Be at least 20 years of age;
- Have completed a college degree (associates, undergraduate, or graduate school) within the last five years;
- Be eligible to work in the United States;
- Pass a background check that includes a criminal history record check;
- Commit to the full term of service (1,800 hours each year);
- Live in the community impacted by the Service Fellow project;
- Meet the qualifications for a specific project assignment; and
- During service, comply with the terms and conditions of the program and local sponsor organization with which they serve.

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Maine Service Fellows are not employees of the host organization but they do receive financial support. The living allowance is set by law at 212% of the federal poverty level and does not vary regardless of a candidate's experience, training, education, location, or project responsibilities. The living allowance lets an individual commitment to full-time service. Health coverage is available for those who need it. On successful completion of the service year, Fellows may be eligible for an end-of-service financial award that can be applied to education-related debt.

Member applications will be available on the Volunteer Maine website, www.VolunteerMaine.gov, following host community selection.

Be a Service Fellows Host Community

Volunteer Maine works with a sponsor organization identified by the community as the lead contact for the project. The program director for Maine Service Fellows is a member of Volunteer Maine's staff. The director helps the sponsor organization finalize the annual work plan, develop a role description including qualifications, recruits potential Service Fellows, helps sponsors select the individual Fellow, convenes and trains sponsor supervisors, convenes and trains Service Fellows, and administers Service Fellows' benefits including the living allowance.

Volunteer Maine covers the cost of Service Fellows' benefits and program-wide training through private donations and a modest appropriation from the legislature. Participating communities contribute a small cost-share of \$1,800 (2023).

Community Eligibility

Rural communities with a need and project in one of the allowed categories may request the aid of a Maine Service Fellow through an application process.

Rural is defined by using the US Dept of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. With one exception, communities must be in a county with a RUCA code between 6 and 10. This means eligible communities are in these counties:

Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington.

Towns in Penobscot County that are outside the Greater Bangor region and have populations under 5,000 are also eligible to participate.

Host applications can be submitted by a single community, a group of communities, or an entire county. In each case, one organization must lead the project and fulfill the sponsor obligations.

Project categories

Community projects must be within one of the areas listed below.

General areas

- COVID 19 recovery
- Housing including eviction prevention
- Workforce development
- Substance use prevention and recovery
- Public health including mental health
- Climate Action areas

Coastal zone

- Community resilience (including climate action planning)
- Transportation
- Energy
- Housing
- Land and fresh-water preservation
- Education (k-12 and community)
- Public health

Service Fellows must devote 20% of their annual work plan to developing regional networks of volunteer programs and leaders.

Sponsor qualifications

Sponsor organizations request the aid of a Maine Service Fellow on behalf of the community and submit the application to host a Service Fellow. The community project and work plan may be a collaboration among several organizations but one of the collaborators must be identified as the Service Fellow sponsor and lead project contact for Volunteer Maine. The sponsor takes responsibility for the Maine Service Fellow and commits to fulfilling the obligations of this role.

Eligible sponsors include public or private non-profits, state/county/local units of government, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, federally recognized tribes, and regional organizations based in the communities impacted.

Organizations that currently have AmeriCorps members, VISTAs, or other service-related members are not eligible to sponsor Service Fellows.

Service Fellows will not be assigned to a community project if the assignment will result in displacement. That means,

- an employer may not use a Fellow to displace an employee or position, including partial displacement such as reduction in hours, wages, or employment benefits.
- a Fellow may not be used to inhibit the advancement of employees within an organization.
- a Fellow may not perform any services or duties or engage in activities that would otherwise be performed by an employee as part of the assigned duties of said employee.
- a Fellow may not perform services or engage in activities that will supplant the hiring of employed workers or are services, duties, or activities with respect to which an individual has recall rights pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement or applicable personnel procedures.
- a Fellow cannot replace an employee who was recently reassigned, discharged, or who resigned. A Fellow cannot replace an employee who is on leave (terminal, temporary, vacation, emergency, or sick) or who is on strike.

Sponsor obligations

Appoint a member of the sponsor organization staff to be the lead contact for Volunteer Maine and the technical supervisor. This person must spend at least 50% of their time working from the same location as the Service Fellow. This ensures the two develop a working relationship that meets the needs of the Service Fellow and the project.

- As lead contact, the person works with Volunteer Maine to finalize the Service Fellow work plan, select the candidate for the project, help the selected candidate relocate and find housing (if applicable), pay the cost share to Volunteer Maine, and become the most knowledgeable about the Maine Service Fellows program. The lead contact also is responsible for ensuring the sponsor organizations policies and procedures permit non-employees to serve at the agency, use agency resources, receive reimbursement for local travel, and are covered by the same accident, injury, and liability insurances as agency clients, interns, or volunteers.
- As technical supervisor, the person commits to orienting the Fellow to the community and the project partners or stakeholders, holding regular one-on-one supervision meetings (at least every two weeks), providing guidance on implementing the project and its workplan, and connecting the Fellow with training and professional development opportunities. This person is also the one designated by the sponsor to ensure the Fellow has appropriate workspace, tools, and technology. The person will also participate in technical supervisor orientation and quarterly meetings, verify hours served by the Service Fellow, submit semi-annual progress reports, and participate in performance assessments.

Recruit and appoint someone to be the Community Liaison for the Service Fellow. The Community Liaison helps the Service Fellow integrate into the community, even when the person is a local. The person in this role is expected to be well connected in the community, has the time to make social introductions, link the Service Fellow to activities of personal interest, and check in with the Service Fellow throughout their service term.

Acknowledge the association/partnership with Maine Service Fellows and Volunteer Maine. Funding for the program comes from both public sources and private donors. Acknowledging the relationship is critical because it helps funders see where their investment is at work and who is serving in the communities.

Sponsors are encouraged, but not required, to provide additional benefits which may include other travel allowances, tuition reimbursements, housing, or additional training opportunities. These are opportunities for project partners to contribute to supporting the Service Fellow and, when identified before recruitment starts, increase the interest of candidates applying to the program.

Volunteer Maine obligations

Maine Service Fellows is a program of Volunteer Maine, the state service commission. As the administrator, the Commission assigns a staff member to be the program director and work with the Advisory Committee that oversees the program. In addition, the Commission has these specific responsibilities:

- Accept applications to host a Service Fellow and manage the review/selection process conducted by reviewers appointed by the program advisory committee. The process will include consideration of the written application as well as information offered by applicants in an interview prior to selection.
- After notifying applicants of selection status, provide technical assistance to sponsor organizations regarding final work plans, role descriptions, and training/professional development plans.
- Develop and execute Memorandum of Understanding with the sponsor organization.
- Assist with promotion of the service opportunity and accept candidate applications.
- Participate in Service Fellow selection process by determining candidates' basic eligibility, joining the site interviews of candidates, and ensuring sponsors are able to conduct the criminal history portion of background checks.
- Execute the Fellow Service Agreement prior to the Service Fellow's first day at the sponsor site. Ensure the individual completes applications or forms needed to set up payment of living allowance, enrollment in health insurance (if needed), and other benefits. All expenses associated with the living allowance, health insurance, member assistance plan, and other benefits will be paid by the program.
- Conduct orientation for sponsor supervisors and Service Fellows prior to the Service Fellows' first day of service.
- Manage the systems for tracking Service Fellows' hours, payment of living allowance, submitting progress reports, and reporting to funders.
- Provide general supervision and team-building opportunities as well as enrichment trainings throughout the year.
- Coordinate with sponsor supervisors to address any Service Fellow performance issues.
- Provide technical assistance to sponsor supervisors as needed.
- Conduct mid-year and end of year annual performance reviews of Service Fellows with the help of sponsor supervisors.
- Report accomplishments to the advisory committee, Commission, and funders.

Community applications

Current status of application process: Open from September 6, 2022 through October 21, 2022

To access the online application, please visit www.volunteermaine.gov/serve-in-maine/service-fellows/service-fellows-sponsor. You may also use the QR code to the right to access the application webpage.

Thank you for reading!

For questions or to discuss your potential project, contact Volunteer Maine at 207-624-7781 or by email, service.commission@maine.gov .





Volunteer Maine

Maine Commission for Community Service

www.VolunteerMaine.gov

207.624.7792

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Our Core Values

Community-driven and government-supported initiatives



Empowering beneficiaries to implement solutions, especially those underrepresented and/or under resourced

Civic identity and common purpose

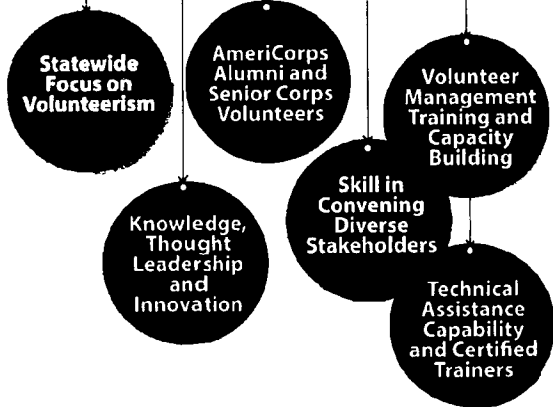


Personal and civic responsibility



Service solutions for community problems

Our Assets



Our Resources



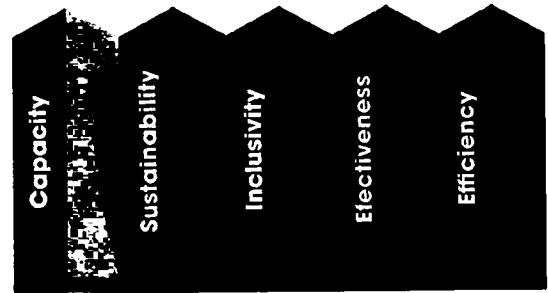
In-Kind Donations & Services



State Funding

Our Impact

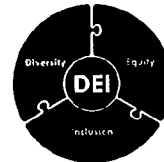
Working to Impact Maine's Volunteer Sector



We Serve



Managers of Volunteers



Organizations serving marginalized and disadvantaged communities



AmeriCorps
Maine Grantees



Organizations Seeking to Engage Volunteers



Agencies Seeking to Develop Service Programs

How We Serve



Promote service as a strategy.



Provide training and technical assistance to volunteer programs & staff.



Make, administer, and evaluate volunteer program grants.



Foster high quality volunteer management practices.



Raising awareness of volunteer sector issues, especially those affecting socially marginalized and/or historically disadvantaged communities.



Volunteer Maine
Maine Commission for Community Service



Who?

Volunteer Maine builds capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer sector.

The Commission Serves:

Managers of volunteers

Maine National Service grantees

Organizations seeking to engage volunteers

Agencies seeking to develop service programs

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES



Serve as Maine's center of excellence on volunteer service.



Provide consultation and training on volunteer engagement



Identify key issues impacting Maine's volunteer sector and Commission grantees



Provide information and data on the status of Maine's volunteer sector, civic health, and civic engagement



Cultivate young volunteer and service leaders.



Leverage the impact of volunteer service to meet state need to attract and retain talented young adults.



Use the Commission as a public voice for the volunteer sector.

Increase recognition, visibility and respect for volunteer efforts.



Promote understanding of connections between volunteering, civic engagement, economic and community success.



Foster a culture of service and civic engagement.

CONTACT:

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Program in statute.

Title 5: ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND SERVICES
Part 17-B: COMMUNITY SERVICE
Chapter 373: MAINE COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

§7506. Maine Service Fellows Program

The Maine Service Fellows Program, referred to in this section as "the program," is established within the commission. Individuals who participate in the program are referred to in this section as "program fellows." The commission shall administer the program in accordance with this section. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

1. Program purposes. The commission shall establish the program to:

A. Increase the opportunities for individuals to devote a year of service to communities in the State; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

B. Attract to and retain in the State motivated adults who have completed a college degree within the prior 5 years to serve in positions where they can apply skills and abilities to projects for the benefit of citizens of the State; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

C. Provide rural and underserved communities in the State a resource to address critical health and human, public safety, education and environmental needs; and [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

D. Strengthen civic engagement of both the program fellows and community residents through solutions based in whole or in part in volunteer service. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

2. Program design. The program must be designed to coordinate with appropriate organizations in the served communities. Program fellows must be required to commit up to 20% of their time in the program to developing regional networks of volunteer programs whose common goals can result in mutual benefits. An entity may submit a proposal to sponsor a program fellow based on guidelines established under this subsection. Services provided by a program fellow may include but are not limited to services to address home evictions, to support workforce development, to mitigate and prevent substance use disorder and to promote mental health. The commission may identify other priority needs of communities to be addressed by the program and may make those services available to eligible communities. During the first 3 years of operation of the program, the commission shall ensure that program fellows focus on helping communities recover from the effects of coronavirus disease 2019, also known as COVID-19, and the related pandemic, while also addressing long-term issues that communities face. The commission shall establish guidelines for the program that include but are not limited to:

A. Limiting the eligibility of entities that may sponsor program fellows to local or county government, school districts, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations and similar entities; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

- B. Establishing standards for local sponsors regarding supervision and support of program fellows during their service; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- C. Ensuring that projects and project proposals are well-designed and measure their impact and do not include partisan or political activity; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- D. Ensuring that program fellows are not used to replace positions eliminated or position hours reduced as a result of budget cuts by the sponsor; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- E. Requiring criminal background checks or other safeguards if projects involve working with vulnerable populations such as schoolchildren or if otherwise required to receive federal funds; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- F. Focusing the program on rural communities as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service's rural-urban continuum codes, except that the commission shall use criteria other than the codes for defining rural communities in Penobscot County; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- G. Authorizing private sector and local partner contributions to program operations for travel reimbursements or training costs; and [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- H. Any other guideline that the commission believes will benefit the program. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

3. Compensation. To the extent funds are available, the commission shall ensure that program fellows receive the following compensation for service:

- A. A stipend set by the commission to achieve an annual income of up to 212% of the nonfarm income official federal poverty level. To the extent the stipend is paid from the General Fund or any other account of the commission, personal liability insurance and workers' compensation insurance, paid for from the same source of funds, must also be provided. Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, program fellows are not employees of the State for the purposes of Title 5, Part 20 ([./5/title5ch0sec0.html](#)); [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- B. A program completion bonus that includes, to the extent established by the commission by rule, an educational loan payment in an amount up to 20% of the stipend value paid on behalf of the program fellow to the holder of the loan; and [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
- C. An allowance to pay for individual health insurance not to exceed 2% of the stipend amount. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

4. Funding. The commission may seek and receive both private and federal funds, grants and gifts in support of the program. The commission may accept funding from other state agencies to support program fellows whose work will support and promote goals of programs administered by those agencies.

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

5. Rules. The commission may adopt rules necessary to carry out the purposes of this section. Rules adopted under this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in chapter 375, subchapter 2-A ([./5/title5ch375sec0.html](#)).