

**132nd Maine Legislature's Committee on Housing and Economic
Development**

**LD 876: An Act to Support Rural Resilience and Emergency Response
Through the Maine Service Fellows Program**

Testimony in Support of LD 876

Chair Curry, Chair Gere and esteemed members of the Joint Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

Good day and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you *in favor* of **LD 876: An Act to Support Rural Resilience and Emergency Response Through the Maine Service Fellows Program**. My name is Jenni Tilton-Flood and I stand before you today not just as a dairy farmer from Maine's Dairy Capital of Clinton, but as Immediate Past Chair of Volunteer Maine, Maine's Commission for Community Service. I have the great honor and privilege of representing our 25 member board, our staff, and the work of building capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer and service communities by funding programs, developing managers of volunteers, raising awareness of sector issues, and promoting service as a strategy. Volunteer Maine was established in 1994 by Executive Order and under state statute in 1995 and its mission is to foster and inspire community service and volunteerism to address critical needs in the State of Maine.

LD 876 serves to strengthen the integral and necessary work that empowers Maine communities and Maine people through the Maine Service Fellows, one of Volunteer Maine's most impactful programs. This program attracts and retains recent college graduates who embed in underserved, rural communities for a year where they work to address critical needs alongside community members on volunteer-based community resilience projects.

This proposed legislation is an investment in the people of Maine at a critical time and juncture. Our Maine Service Fellows have already proven their impact in those communities where they've served, from achieving \$300,000 in resilience grants in Oxford County to hundreds of homes improving energy efficiency in Dover-Foxcroft and the Passamaquoddy Pleasant Point Reservation. Current Fellows are advancing critical climate action resiliency projects in Aroostook, Piscataquis, Hancock, and Washington counties.

This bill is about Maine Solutions for Maine People. We know how special this State is and we need Maine Sized programs to unleash the full potential of our communities, economy, workforce and lands. Maine Service Fellows places skilled individuals where they are needed NOW to help Mainers prepare for TOMORROW. *The funding in this bill immediately supports rural Maine communities by scaling up an already successful program.*

We all know how valuable and productive service corps members are in our state. There were over 120 AmeriCorps members in Maine providing services throughout the state, meeting the real and pressing needs of Mainers- as a matter of fact each and every one of you on the HED Committee represent at least one community with an AmeriCorps member and program. An investment in this proven model of programming is an investment in our state, the working lands, workforce, economy, and most importantly, the people of Maine. We applaud Representative Rielly and Co Sponsors Senator Bennett and Representatives Dana, Eaton, Malon and Pluecker for the proposal and opportunity of LD 876 and urge support to move this forward.

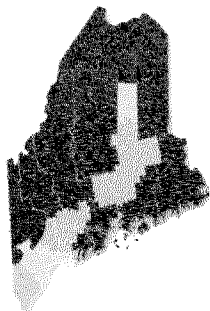
I welcome any questions and also invite you to include Volunteer Maine Executive Director Brittany Gleixner-Hayat (brittany.Gleixner-Hayat@maine.gov), Volunteer Services Coordinator Maureen Kendzierski (maureen.kendzierski@maine.gov), and Commission Chair Luke Shorty (lshorty@gmail.com) as providers of information, experience and expertise now and moving forward.

Thank you for your time today and for your continued commitment and service as citizen legislators.

Sincerely,
Jenni Tilton-Flood
Immediate Past Chair, Volunteer Maine
207.313.3531
[https://volunteermaine.gov/
jtiltonflood@me.com](https://volunteermaine.gov/jtiltonflood@me.com)

Maine Service Fellows

The Maine Service Fellows program was established to help rural communities by assigning someone to devote full-time effort to a critical need. It recognizes that some communities do not have the municipal or nonprofit staff available to research solutions, secure resources, and manage a project. These programs attract and retain people with a passion for public services and increase opportunities for recent college graduates to learn new skills to make a difference.



Community partnerships submit workplans that address needs related to housing, workforce development, climate action, substance use prevention and recovery, public health including mental health and COVID-19 recovery. Eligible communities are 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.

Funding for the Maine Service Fellows in 2024 came from the Maine Volunteer Foundation and a one-time allocation from the state. A new award through Resilient Maine, a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, will support five positions in 2025. Fellows will assist towns and municipalities with developing and/or implementing their Community Resilience Plans (CRP).

Sam Gilbert: Addressing Energy Efficiency for Homeowners

Sam Gilbert, highlighted in the 2023 Annual Report finished his term of service in 2024 with the Sipayik Resilience Committee, a community group focused on climate action and resilience serving the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik. His assignment was focused on energy efficiency for homeowners. Upon completion of service, Sam was grateful for the opportunity to help his community by improving their energy literacy. He shared, "It was a rewarding experience to see my community and neighboring communities work together to help each other. I used to count on just myself, but now I see we can get more accomplished if we work together as a team." Upon completion of his service, Sam had a new-found interest in energy efficiency and weatherization and pursued technical training to receive certifications and licensure to conduct energy audits. He has an interest in serving his local community as an entrepreneur.

James Fagan: Building Climate Resilience

James Fagan completed a year of service as a Maine Service Fellow in Dover-Foxcroft, tasked with advancing climate action and resiliency efforts.

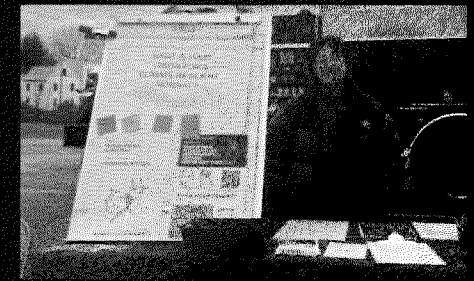
Fagan, who has lived in the area most of his life, served as an Energy Collaborative Climate Fellow, where he worked with the Commons Energy Collaborative, the Climate Action Advisory Committee, and Maine Highlands Window Dressers. His work included planning policy for heating and cooling centers, presenting to the town select board, recruiting volunteers, and hosting workshops on community resilience. Reflecting on his experience, Fagan emphasized the importance of including youth in leadership roles, stating, "Programs like the Maine Service Fellows are vital for engaging often-overlooked groups in decision-making and community-building."

At the December 2024 Volunteer Maine Board of Commissioners meeting, Fagan was presented with a \$5,349 education award by John Portela, President of the Maine Volunteer Foundation, in recognition of his contributions. James Fagan will renew his service and continue as a Fellow for the 2025 service year with Dover-Foxcroft.



John Portela (left) and Luke Shorty (right) present education award to James Fagan (middle).

Gianluca De Rosas: Engaging and Educating Community



Gianluca De Rosas stands outside polls in November to talk to residents about their climate resilience vision for Norway.

Gianluca De Rosas began as a Maine Service Fellow in August of 2024. De Rosas is working in the town of Norway with the Center for an Ecology-based Economy (CEBE) addressing regional volunteer capacity and coordinating community climate groups and municipal resilience committees.

So far, he has planned and facilitated over ten different climate workshops and community engagement processes as part of the Community Resilience Partnership, the Norway Climate Action Plan, and the CEBE-A Climate to Thrive.

Maine Service Fellows gain valuable hands-on experience as De Rosas experience illustrates. He says, "This fellowship has shown me a transformative learning experience. I've worked closely with municipalities to enroll in Maine's Community Resilience Partnership, facilitating public meetings, helping prioritize projects, and securing funding through grant writing. Leading the planning and writing of Norway's Climate Action Plan has taught me how to integrate climate research, community input, and equity-based solutions to address resilience challenges." De Rosas will finish his term in June of 2025.



AmeriCorps Maine

Where do they serve?

	AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA	AmeriCorps Seniors	County		AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA	AmeriCorps Seniors	County
Acton		X	York	Carrabassett Valley	X		Franklin
Addison	X		Washington	Cary		X	Aroostook
Alfred	X	X	York	Castle Hill		X	Aroostook
Andover North Surplus	X		Oxford	Caswell		X	Aroostook
Anson		X	Somerset	Chapman		X	Aroostook
Arrowsic	X		Sagadahoc	Chebeague Island	X		Cumberland
Arundel		X	York	Columbia	X		Washington
Ashland		X	Aroostook	Connor		X	Aroostook
Auburn	X	X	Androscoggin	Cornish		X	York
Augusta	X	X	Kennebec	Cross Lake		X	Aroostook
Baileyville	X	X	Washington	Crouseville		X	Aroostook
Bangor	X	X	Penobscot	Crystal		X	Aroostook
Bar Harbor	X		Hancock	Cumberland		X	Cumberland
Bath	X		Sagadahoc	Cutler	X		Washington
Beals	X		Washington	Cyr Plantation		X	Aroostook
Belfast	X	X	Waldo	Damariscotta	X		Lincoln
Benedicta		X	Aroostook	Danforth		X	Washington
Bethel	X		Oxford	Dayton		X	York
Biddeford		X	York	Deer Isle	X		Hancock
Blaine		X	Aroostook	Denmark	X		Oxford
Blue Hill		X	Hancock	Dover- Foxcroft	X	X	Piscataquis
Boothbay	X		Lincoln	Eagle Lake		X	Aroostook
Bradley	X		Penobscot	East Machias	X		Washington
Bremen	X		Lincoln	Easton		X	Aroostook
Brewer	X	X	Penobscot	Edgecomb	X		Lincoln
Bridgewater		X	Aroostook	Eliot	X	X	York
Bridgton	X		Cumberland	Ellsworth	X		Hancock
Brooks		X	Waldo	Fairfield	X	X	Somerset
Brunswick	X	X	Sagadahoc	Falmouth	X	X	Cumberland
Bryant Pond	X		Oxford	Farmingdale		X	Kennebec
Buxton		X	York	Fayette	X		Kennebec
Byron	X		Oxford	Fort Fairfield		X	Aroostook
Camden	X		Knox	Fort Kent		X	Aroostook
Cape Elizabeth	X	X	Cumberland	Freeport	X		Cumberland
Caribou	X		Aroostook	Frenchville		X	Aroostook
Caribou		X	Aroostook	Fryeburg	X	X	Oxford



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AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA	AmeriCorps Seniors	County	AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA	AmeriCorps Seniors	County
Gardiner	X	Kennebec	Lincolnville	X	Waldo
Garfield	X	Aroostook	Linnus	X	Aroostook
Plantation			Lisbon	X	Androscoggin
Georgetown	X	Sagadahoc	Litchfield	X	Kennebec
Gorham	X	Cumberland	Littleton	X	Aroostook
Grand Isle		Aroostook	Long Island	X	Cumberland
Grand Lake	X	Washington	Lubec	X	Washington
Stream PLT			Lyman	X	York
Gray	X	Cumberland	Machias	X	Washington
Guilford	X	Piscataquis	Madawaska	X	Aroostook
Hallowell	X	Kennebec	Madawaska	X	Aroostook
Hammond		Aroostook	Lake		
Hancock	X	Hancock	Madison	X	Somerset
Harpwell	X	Sagadahoc	Madrid TWP	X	Franklin
Harrington	X	Washington	Mapleton	X	Aroostook
Hartland	X	Somerset	Mars Hill	X	Aroostook
Hebron	X	Oxford	Masardis	X	Aroostook
Hersey	X	Aroostook	Mechanic Falls	X	Androscoggin
Hinckley	X	Somerset	Millinocket	X	Penobscot
Hiram		Oxford	Milo	X	Penobscot
Hodgdon	X	Aroostook	Monmouth	X	Kennebec
Holbrook	X	Hancock	Monticello	X	Aroostook
Island			Mount Chase	X	Penobscot
Holden	X	Penobscot	New Canada	X	Aroostook
Hollis	X	York	New	X	Cumberland
Houlton	X	Aroostook	Gloucester		
Houlton	X	Aroostook	New Limerick	X	Aroostook
Island Falls	X	Aroostook	New Sweden	X	Aroostook
Jay	X	Franklin	Newfield	X	York
Kennebunk	X	York	Newport	X	Penobscot
Kennebunkport	X	York	Norridgewock	X	Somerset
Kittery	X	York	North Berwick	X	York
Levant	X	Penobscot	North Haven	X	Knox
Lewiston	X	Androscoggin	Norway	X	Oxford
Lille	X	Aroostook	Oakfield	X	Aroostook
Limerick	X	York	Oakland	X	Kennebec
Limestone	X	Aroostook	Ogunquit	X	York
Limestone	X	Aroostook	Old Town	X	Penobscot
Limington	X	York			



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	AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA	AmeriCorps Seniors	County		AmeriCorps State/National and VISTA	AmeriCorps Seniors	County
Orono	X	X	Penobscot	South Portland	X	X	Cumberland
Oxford	X	X	Oxford	South	X		Knox
Parsonfield		X	York	Thomaston			
Patten	X	X	Penobscot	Southwest	X		Hancock
Pembroke	X		Washington	Harbor			
Perham		X	Aroostook	St Agatha		X	Aroostook
Perry		X	Washington	St Albans		X	Somerset
Phippsburg	X		Sagadahoc	St David		X	Aroostook
Pittsfield		X	Somerset	Standish		X	Cumberland
Pittston		X	Kennebec	Stockholm		X	Aroostook
Poland	X		Androscoggin	T10 R12 WELS	X		Aroostook
Portage		X	Aroostook	T15 R9 WELS	X		Aroostook
Portland	X	X	Cumberland	Topsham		X	Sagadahoc
Pownal	X		Cumberland	Turner	X		Androscoggin
Presque Isle	X		Aroostook	Van Buren		X	Aroostook
Presque Isle		X	Aroostook	Vienna	X		Kennebec
Rainbow TWP	X		Piscataquis	Vinalhaven	X		Knox
Rangeley	X		Franklin	Wallagrass		X	Aroostook
Raymond		X	Androscoggin	Washburn		X	Aroostook
Readfield	X	X	Kennebec	Waterboro		X	York
Rockland	X	X	Knox	Waterville	X	X	Kennebec
Saco		X	York	Weld	X		Franklin
Sandy River PLT	X		Franklin	Wells	X	X	York
Sanford		X	York	West Bath	X		Sagadahoc
Scarborough	X		Cumberland	West Boothbay	X		Lincoln
Seal Harbor		X	Hancock	Harbor			
Sebago	X	X	Cumberland	Westbrook	X	X	Cumberland
Shapleigh		X	York	Westfield		X	Aroostook
Shawtown TWP	X		Piscataquis	Windham	X	X	Cumberland
Sherman	X		Aroostook	Winslow		X	Kennebec
Sherman		X	Aroostook	Winterville		X	Aroostook
Sidney		X	Kennebec	Winthrop		X	Kennebec
Skowhegan	X	X	Somerset	Woodland		X	Aroostook
Smithfield		X	Somerset	Woolwich	X		Sagadahoc
Smyrna Mills		X	Aroostook	Wyman TWP	X		Franklin
South Berwick	X	X	York	Yarmouth	X	X	Cumberland
South China		X	Kennebec	York	X	X	York
South Paris	X		Oxford	Data from 2023-2024 program year.			File date:4/25