

Testimony of the Paige Atkinson in Support of LD 143, An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism

January 31, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Paige Atkinson and I live in Eastport, Maine. Currently I am serving as an Island Fellow with the City of Eastport, working on projects related to energy and community resiliency. I support LD 143 because it would bring additional capacity to rural communities and provide people with an opportunity to serve.

I have seen the benefits of having an extra pair of hands in a small community. Fellows are able to support communities with limited staff. While Eastport has an office staff of 6, everyone wears multiple hats: our city clerk is also the Tax Collector, Registrar of Voters, Vital Records manager, a DMV representative, and snack provider extraordinaire. It is through the unmatched dedication of individuals like Ella that municipalities function; but they are limited by the additional projects they are able to take on. By hosting a Fellow, communities can engage in projects that they otherwise wouldn't have the bandwidth to take on.

For example, Eastport joined the Community Resilience Partnership (CRP) during my service because I was able to dedicate time to ensure the necessary steps were completed. Eastport had considered applying before, but did not have the staff time to dedicate to doing so. I was able to step in and facilitate this process, connecting Eastport to a larger network of like-minded communities and grants that they otherwise wouldn't have had access to. Eastport's already successfully applied and received funding through the CRP to assist us with a home weatherization campaign, having a direct impact addressing a great need as identified members of our community

This is just one example of the work being done and Island Fellow; I have colleagues that are doing extraordinary work across Maine's island and coastal communities. Melanie on Long Island helped update the town's Comprehensive Plan; Kalyn is working on Vinalhaven on expanding technology use in their schools; Liv on Isleboro is working with the sea level rise committee and on the preservation of the Grindle Point Lighthouse. The Island Fellows program has shown how impactful this type of work can be in communities across the state. By increasing the number of fellows serving in Maine, imagine what can be accomplished.

Communities are not the only ones benefiting from participating in these programs. Since graduating, I have pursued multiple pathways of service; from Peace Corps in the Philippines, to a rural nonprofit with Washington State's Service Corps, and now the Island Fellowship. I have a passion for service. I have been lucky to participate in each of these programs and have learned a lot along the way. Because of this service, I have been able to live and work in this great state. I have been welcomed into a community that has helped me grow both personally and professionally.

My time with the City of Eastport has given me a front row set to the challenges faced by rural municipalities. Every day they are struggling on how to provide the best services to their

residents given the limited resources they have. It takes people with a passion for their communities to fill these roles. The dedication these people have for their communities is inspiration. Through funding the State Service Fellows program you are allowing others to come and learn about what makes Maine so great. They can learn from the folks who make this state what it is and share new skills. From how to drive in the snow to how to crack open a lobster, there is so much that Maine has to offer. My service has allowed me to explore ways that I can best utilize my skills and passions to serve others. As I look towards the future and what my next step is, I know that I will take so much from this fellowship forward.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 143 and to expand the Maine State Fellows program. I strongly believe that it would bring additional capacity to rural communities and provide people with an opportunity to serve. Thank you again for allowing me to speak before you today.

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