



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of
LD 143: An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Room 208, Cross State Office Building
Tuesday, January 31, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. MPHA supports LD 143: “An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism,” which provides funding for the Maine Service Fellows Program.

MPHA is the state’s oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine’s communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

MPHA serves as co-lead of the Maine Climate Council’s Community Resilience Planning, Public Health, and Emergency Management Working Group. The recommendation to establish a Maine Climate Corps came out of one of our public stakeholder meetings and is included in the [public health sub-group’s recommendations report](#) to the Maine Climate Council. Specifically, our sub-group supported subsidized education and/or job training for new “green” jobs, as well as the development of a “MaineCorps” (similar to AmeriCorps or Civilian Conservation Corps), which would focus on climate-related projects. Our working group was pleased to see the final recommendation in the [Maine Climate Council’s Climate Action Plan](#), which is for the state to “Partner with service-learning organizations and nonprofit organizations to launch a Maine Climate Corps program by 2023.” The Maine Service Fellows Program works across public health areas, including climate action, as well as mental health and housing. Notably, there is an intentional focus on supporting rural and underserved communities.

We have seen the breadth of impact that climate change has already had on Maine’s economy. Industries have already started – and will continue to need – to evolve to meet the changing demands placed on the state by climate change. There is no area of our economy that is insulated from the impacts of climate change – from real estate markets and housing to community resilience and design, renewable energy, waste management, natural resource management, sustainable farming practices, emergency preparedness, and many more. Climate change is a public health emergency that acts as a threat multiplier, exacerbating existing health inequities, including poverty, environmental degradation, and political instability. Like health inequities, climate change is

a problem rooted in the structures, systems, and values of our society and economy. Eliminating health inequities and mitigating climate change threats requires an intersectoral and transformational approach.¹

The Maine Service Fellows Program represents such a transformational investment in bettering health and economic security in rural and underserved communities. Funding this program will improve Maine's workforce readiness and skills training, economy, and resilience to climate change, and is particularly timely as the state, nation and world rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is a promising and worthwhile investment in Maine's public health workforce and climate resilience efforts. On behalf of Maine Public Health Association, I respectfully request you vote LD 143 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Rudolph L, Harrison C, Buckley L & North S. (2018). *Climate Change, Health, and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Departments*. Oakland, CA and Washington D.C., Public Health Institute and American Public Health Association.