



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs  
From: Nathan Davis, Sierra Club Maine  
Date: January 27, 2023  
Re: **Testimony in Support of LD 143: An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism**

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Nathan Davis, and I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 143: An Act to Support Rural Service Programming and Promote Volunteerism.

I live in Rockland and am a former Rockland City Councilor, and I can tell you firsthand how frequently - and how frustratingly - rural communities in Maine find themselves without the capacity to address the seemingly intractable social problems that sometimes beset us. Along with my peers in local government, I spent (and still spend) sleepless nights wondering how to address the challenges of affordable housing, generational poverty, pervasive substance use, and environmental degradation despite an unrelenting scarcity of staff and volunteer capacity. Many of the programs and projects that local communities could pursue (for example, mentorship and training for at-risk youth) come with relatively low capital costs; the problem is finding and funding people to do the work.

LD 143 funds fifteen fellows in the Maine Service Fellows Program, which will provide rural and underserved communities in Maine with a resource to address critical health and human, public safety, education and environmental needs; and will provide services including but not limited to addressing home evictions, supporting workforce development, mitigating and preventing substance use disorder, and promoting mental health<sup>1</sup>. These services squarely address the challenges so many rural communities face, including Rockland. But aside from merely providing services, this program fosters a culture of volunteerism and civic engagement, especially among recent college graduates, whose participation in civic life is essential to Maine's future. It also incorporates guidelines for project design and impact measurement, ensuring that the time of its Fellows is well-spent.

More generally, the Sierra Club recognizes the link between social justice and environmental justice, and we believe that supporting critical human needs through the Maine Service Fellows Program also supports the right to a clean and healthful environment for all people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0748&item=3&snm=130>

We urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 143. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Nathan Davis  
Sierra Club Maine  
Legislative Team member