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Testimony of Representative Morgan Rielly presenting

LD 142, “An Act to Fund Climate-related Service Work”

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs. My name is Morgan Rielly, and I represent House District 127, which includes part of Westbrook. I am here today to present **LD 142, An Act to Fund Climate-related Service Work**, which would fully fund the existing Maine Climate Corps Program (MCC) Program.

Background of MCC:

During the First Special session of the 130th Legislature, the Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee unanimously passed my bill, **LD 722**, which directed Volunteer Maine to study the establishment of a Maine Climate Corps. From August 2021 until January 2022, Volunteer Maine and the Maine Climate Corps Report Oversight Task Force, which I was a member of, developed a series of recommendations and identified priority projects for a Climate Corps to take up and address. The study, titled *Maine Climate Corps: Inspired by History. Designed for Today.*, was finalized and submitted to the ENR Committee on January 28th of last year. A copy of the report with its recommendations has been included with my testimony for your review. I am proud of what the task force accomplished. The Corps is “based on current science and expressed need of Maine communities.” The MCC is rooted in service, equity, and good science. It will and has already served as a bipartisan model for other states developing Climate Corps.

LD 1974, which was reported out by ENR, established the MCC as laid out in *Maine Climate Corps: Inspired by History. Designed for Today*. It received a unanimous vote in committee and was signed into law by the Governor. The Corps has eight climate-related focus areas: coastal zone, transportation, energy, housing, land and fresh water preservation, community resilience,

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education, and public health. This will give the Corps the necessary flexibility and breadth to work on climate mitigation issues along with assisting communities with climate resiliency in a variety of focus areas to maximize its impact throughout the state.

In the report, and after discussing with potential partners and communities across Maine, we were able to further identify 11 priority projects for the Corps to begin work on with community partners. These priority projects are community resilience planning, energy education and outreach, “lead by example,” home energy conservation management, emergency management community assistance, healthy soils and regenerative agriculture outreach and education, local foods program, community solar projects, invasive species monitoring and management, shoreline monitoring and stabilization, and green schools.

Our initial request was for a Corps of 20 members, but were only able to secure four. These Corps members will be working with Downeast Partners, the Community Action Program of Washington and Hancock Counties, starting this spring. The Commission decided that it made sense to focus the Corps on one priority and chose to prioritize energy conservation projects due to the ongoing energy crisis here in the state.

Service activities for energy efficiency include, but are not limited to, the following: energy audits of weatherization assistance program in clients’ homes, education on energy efficiency, and DIY projects for community residents. Corps members will receive extensive training and credentials in weatherization that will serve as an on-ramp to careers in the energy efficiency sector. The Climate Corps grant only covers pay and benefits for the Corps members and supervisors. The program must leverage local resources for transportation, training, materials, supplies, and administration.

Volunteer Maine, in their testimony, can go into further detail about sponsor qualifications and sponsor obligations. They can also discuss the commission's obligations and the application process for both Corps members and host communities and organizations. They will also go into detail about living stipends and benefits for Corps members.



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Goals of LD 142:

Volunteer Maine cannot operate an effective program with only four Corps members. Volunteer Maine, communities and organizations across the state, and myself would like to see a fully funded program, which LD 142 would accomplish.

As discussed in my testimony in LD 143, service programs in Maine, as seen with Maine's Conservation Corps, typically generate \$3 in return investments for every \$1 that is spent, which stays in the communities service members operate in. AmeriCorps programming has [generated roughly \\$34](#) in return investment for every federal dollar spent. Our hope is that in the future we will be able to use federal monies from AmeriCorps to help fund the Climate Corps. Volunteer Maine has said they would plan to see a return on investment for the Maine Climate Corps with the money staying within these communities, building up local infrastructure that will make them and partner organizations self-sustaining after Corps members have completed their work.

Volunteer Maine, through LD 142, hopes to expand the Climate Corps program to address the following priority project areas:

- Energy "Lead By Example": Corps members will focus on increasing energy efficiency and helping public schools and towns save money.
- Emergency Preparedness and Natural Hazard Mitigation Planning: Corps members will work with small rural communities who need help developing emergency plans to access federal funds to mitigate the risk from more extreme storms and other events.
- Invasive Species: Corps members will work with communities that need help with intervention to tackle browntail moth, invasive plants, green crabs, and more. This has a serious impact on our shellfish fisheries and for our sportsmen.
- Housing: Corps members will perform home repairs as needed before weatherization services can be provided to some of the neediest Mainers.

The Maine Climate Corps will provide on-ramps to meaningful careers that are in-demand. Our state's bipartisan Climate Corps will provide training, credentials, and on-the-job experience that

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will prepare Mainers with the skills needed by Maine employers. Small communities and organizations need added human resource capacity to combat some of our biggest challenges: preventing tick-borne illness, increasing our local food supply, or helping seniors stay warm in their homes.

Since July 2022, Volunteer Maine has connected with over 20 Maine organizations who could benefit from having a Climate Corps member. This is an in-demand and popular program that needs additional funds to be effective in aiding Mainers in need from the Downeast to the Piscataqua River.

This is a fiscally smart investment that will leverage state and future federal monies in order to make the strongest possible impact in addressing climate related issues our state faces in a systematic and efficient way.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions or to provide you with any information for your upcoming work session.