

To Whom it may concern:

I am writing today in support of LD1010.

"An Act To Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program" (HP0748) (Presented by Representative RIELLY, M. of Westbrook) (Cosponsored by Senator BALDACCI, J. of Penobscot, Senator MOORE, M. of Washington, Representative CLOUTIER, K. of Lewiston, Speaker FECTEAU, R. of Biddeford, Representative CARLOW, N. of Buxton, Representative WARREN, S. of Scarborough, Representative MATLACK, A. of St. George, Representative RISEMAN, W. of Harrison)

My past experience as chair and member of the Maine state service commission, Volunteer Maine, and my current role as board member of the Maine volunteer Foundation, give me a unique understanding of the need for such a program.

I want to acknowledge that AmeriCorps has been a tremendous resource for Maine for over 25 years. Yet, for Maine's largely small municipal, nonprofit, and educational agencies, the federal administrative regulations cannot be "right-sized" to match their operations. AmeriCorps is a complex federal program that takes nearly a year of unfunded preparation (application to service start) and nearly 18 months of implementation effort (due to federal requirements) before a sponsor sees any return on investment.

Maine Service Fellows is designed for small communities and micro-organizations in rural areas where the greatest assets are human resources and the greatest need is someone to devote time to developing or implementing a volunteer-driven solution to a problem. Communities can access Service Fellow help more rapidly than other service programs. The community needs and solutions the Maine Service Fellow will tackle are defined and implemented under local guidance.

This LD is asking for 10 Service Fellows to be imbedded into the most rural Maine Counties to support their recovery from the problems the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. These needs, we have found, are different for each county.

Admittedly, the pilot class of 10 Maine Service Fellows is small compared to the scope of issues rural towns and organizations have to address. As the economy improves and private dollars return, the Foundation is committed to securing private sector funds to build the program and make it accessible to more regions. That future goal cannot hold up the immediate possibility of helping at least 10 rural areas.

As the program evolved, members of the public, municipal officials, and nonprofit as well as school district representatives came together in focus groups to tell the Maine commission what they needed and what would work. Some of the areas identified as needing support related to mental health, work force development, housing, substance abuse recovery and many COVID-19 recovery community needs. The program design recognizes that Washington County is different from Cumberland County in terms of populations and resources and needs.

What are the benefits to the State?

- It gives stressed communities additional human resources to provide vital services and support planning for local COVID recovery.
- It offers community residents pathways to join recovery efforts under the leadership of someone skilled at organizing service programs
- It creates a pathway to address local needs without the burden and red tape of a federal program

For the Service Fellow we see the benefits as such:

- It gives people who face a very difficult job market a productive focus and purpose as they contribute their time and talent to community recovery.
In national service programs, applications out-pace the actual positions by 3 applicants for every 1 position.

- Those who serve will develop networks that lead to future employment. It is anticipated that, like the great recession of 2007-2009, people will turn to service as a way to try new career paths, hone skills, and build personal networks that lead to employment. (The research finding that service is a pathway to employment is verified in the fact 7 of 10 Maine AmeriCorps members report they developed relationships that added to their career-focused network.)
- It makes a year of full-time community service feasible for young adults from all economic backgrounds by providing a living allowance that is just over 200% of the federal poverty level.
- Their service strengthens bonds with both people and place. Those who volunteer and serve in a community set deep roots in that community. In Maine, 25% of the young adults who move here to do a year of community service remain and make Maine their home.

Ronald Holmes
New Sharon

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