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*Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of
LD 1010, An Act to Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Kristen Cloutier and I proudly represent House District 60, part of Lewiston. I am here in support of **LD 1010, An Act to Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program**.

Establishing this program will provide valuable opportunities and experiences to young Mainers. This legislation is aimed specifically at addressing the state's growing workforce shortage, something we should all be greatly concerned about. As young Mainers continue to leave our state after they graduate, our economy will suffer and so will the services and programs that rely on a strong, reliable workforce to meet the needs of our communities.

When I am not serving in the Legislature, I work full-time at the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships at Bates College. In that role, and as a former municipal official, I have witnessed first-hand the impact that service programs such as this one can have on a community. Many of our community partners and organizations in Lewiston rely on a similar federal program called AmeriCorps to staff essential programming. AmeriCorps is a federal agency that brings together millions of Americans in service through its volunteer programs by connecting individuals and organizations to help communities tackle their toughest challenges.

Whereas AmeriCorps dollars tend to flow to more urban service-centers, the Maine Service Fellows Programs directly addresses the disproportionate impact the workforce shortage has on our rural communities. Recent college graduates will be able to partake in full-time service to rural communities across the state to address a variety of issues, including housing, workforce development, substance use prevention and recovery, public health and mental health. Providing these opportunities to young Mainers will help create a sense of commitment and belonging in our state, will empower a new generation of leaders to tackle the critical issues we continue to face and will make Maine a better place to live and work.

Additionally, service fellows will be paid a \$15 minimum wage along with around \$5,000 in student loan forgiveness upon completion of one year of service – an additional incentive to stay in our state and become an active member of our workforce.

This program will play a key role in how Maine's rural communities overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout, while expanding employment opportunities during uncertain times.

I am proud to support this legislation and I hope you will too.