



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Taxation

From: Philip Mathieu, Sierra Club Maine

Date: April 27, 2021

Re: **Testimony in Support of LD 1410 An Act To Incentivize the Development of the Labor Force in the Green Jobs Sector through Assistance in Repaying Student Loan Debt**

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Senator Chipman, Representative Terry, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present my testimony. My name is Philip Mathieu, and I come before you on behalf of Sierra Club Maine's more than 20,000 members and supporters. 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 work to explore, enjoy, and protect the planet, and we strongly support LD 1410 in pursuit of that mission.

In addition to representing the Sierra Club Maine, I come to you today as a "returner," having been born in Portland, grown up in New Hampshire, attended college in Rhode Island, and returned to work in Maine. I now work full time as a conservation professional with a small land trust. I also, like so many of my peers, graduated with a significant amount of student loan debt, in my case totalling just over \$40,000. In other words, I am exactly the kind of person this program is designed to attract to and retain in our state, particularly in the green job sector.

LD 1410 plays a dual role: reducing the financial burden of obtaining a college education and encouraging workforce development in the "green" and STEM job sectors. This bill has the opportunity to be transformative in both capacities. For individuals like me, the credit created by this bill would make it easier to pay for the education that is often necessary to pursue a green career. It would also significantly lower the barrier to entry for green jobs that are often underfunded, including non-profit roles like the one I hold.

For the greater Maine economy, this credit could help attract competitive, experienced candidates to green jobs at a time where we most need them. The Educational Opportunity Tax Credit already does some of this work, and is responsible for many Mainers (including myself, at least partially) working in the state today. This bill would

functionally replace the STEM-focused component of the existing tax credit while also widening the credit to include other green jobs. This is a logical next step that recognizes the different tracks that can lead to green jobs, including those originating from non-STEM fields.

This approach is particularly compelling when you consider this bill through an equity lens. A program that helps mitigate the burden of student loans inherently benefits those that might not otherwise be able to afford a college education, and those who might have the hardest time repaying those loans. Even I, someone who has experienced the economic privilege of growing up in a middle class family and benefited from an Ivy-league education, have had to make career decisions based in part on my anticipated student loan payments. This program would help make paying for a college education and using that education for a green job more affordable for many Mainers and prospective Mainers, including those that haven't benefited from the privileges I have.

This bill is a meaningful investment in the future of both the people and the economy of our state. On behalf of the Sierra Club Maine, I urge you to support LD 1410.

Respectfully submitted,

Philip Mathieu  
Legislative Team Volunteer  
Sierra Club Maine