



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
From: David Gibson, Sierra Club Maine
Date: March 20, 2021
Re: Testimony in Support of LD 722: **Resolve, to Study the Establishment of the Maine Climate Corps**

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources: my name is David Gibson, and I represent Sierra Club Maine and our 22,000 supporters and members across the state. We voice our support for this legislation: *LD 722 Resolve to Study the Establishment of the Maine Climate Corps*.

I have extensive experience with AmeriCorps programs. This includes serving as an AmeriCorps Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) for 1.5 years (2009-2011) with the non-profit Envirolution in Reno, Nevada; 3 years overseeing other AmeriCorps Volunteers (2011-2014) for Envirolution; and creating a new AmeriCops program, the Nevada Clean Energy Corps (2015/2016), while I worked for the Nevada Governor's Office of Energy. I hope that my past service and experience provides benefit and useful insights for this committee.

In 2009, after three years of working in construction management in Connecticut and New Jersey, I resigned from my job in order to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA with Envirolution in Reno. Envirolution was a small start-up non-profit that had been created by some colleagues I knew from Connecticut. While serving as an AmeriCorps member, I developed hands-on lessons and curriculum to teach middle school and high school students about energy efficiency and clean energy. We developed partnerships with local schools where I worked directly in the classroom, leading students on energy assessments of their school buildings. I created homework assignments that had the students identifying how their homes use energy and ways to reduce energy use and costs for their families.

Over 5 years, I transitioned from an AmeriCorps member to staff at Envirolution, and managed other AmeriCorps members as they helped expand the programmatic offerings and reach. We led professional development workshops for teachers in Reno and Las Vegas, training hundreds of teachers how to use the lessons, materials and curriculum that we developed to teach their students. We helped the students to identify energy-saving measures for their schools, and student teams develop cost-saving proposals for their school administrators. Today, Envirolution is actively working with 140+ teachers at 50 schools, and has reached more than 25,000 students in just the last four years. This is the impact that AmeriCorps programs can have for the local community.
(<https://envirolution.org/programs/education/project-recharge/>)

In 2014, I was hired by the Nevada Governor's Office of Energy to implement efficiency programs throughout the state. In addition to leading programs for home energy retrofits for low-income seniors, and developing self-funding energy-saving performance contracting projects for cities, counties, school

districts and state agencies, I also led the development of a new AmeriCorps program, the Nevada Clean Energy Corps.

The Nevada Clean Energy Corps (NCEC) members provided outreach to Nevada residents, conducted energy assessments, assisted with implementing energy efficiency and water conservation projects (directly installing LED light bulbs and low-flow showerheads for low-income households), and tracked the impact of the installed measures. In addition, the members gained valuable work experience, professional development and practical training and certifications. All members received professional training for Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET) certification as Home Energy Rating System (HERS) raters. HERS is the system used by the real estate industry to index a homes' efficiency for new construction and efficiency improvements on existing homes. As a federally funded AmeriCorps program, the Nevada Clean Energy Corps (NCEC) goal was to increase residential energy efficiency statewide by providing services that promote healthy and energy efficient homes for senior citizens, low income families and veterans of the armed forces. The NCEC provides opportunity for young professionals to make meaningful contributions toward a sustainable energy future for residents throughout Nevada. The NCEC program was created through an AmeriCorps grant issued to the Nevada Governor's Office of Energy. The mission of the Governor's Office of Energy (GOE) is to ensure the wise development of Nevada's energy resources in harmony with local economic needs and to position Nevada to lead the nation in renewable energy production, energy conservation and transmission and transportation of energy. (<https://my.americorps.gov/mp/listing/viewListing.do?id=63846>)

AmeriCorps programs can fill critical gaps in existing efficiency and clean energy program. By providing outreach, installing low-cost efficiency measures, and providing information about existing programs, rebates, incentives and financing available, a 'Clean Energy Corps' program can increase demand for home energy retrofits, heat pumps, and solar. To reach 100% clean energy statewide, every single home and business in Maine will need to transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. An AmeriCorps program can provide door-to-door outreach one neighborhood at a time to reach every single household in the state.

In addition to energy efficiency and clean energy, we would also recommend that the Maine Climate Corps engage in projects relating to:

- Organic farming & regenerative agriculture with distribution to local (low-income) community
- Community-based composting
- Biochar production and distribution
- Designing and planting community food forests
- Designing and implementing permaculture projects
- Wetland restoration
- Reforestation/afforestation
- Creation and maintenance of walking and biking paths
- Waterway restoration
- Community education about climate solutions and rebates, incentives and financing available

From my experience with AmeriCorps programs, I would recommend that each program include training that leads to a relevant professional certification. This provides members with tangible skills and helps build their resume for a future career. We encourage the Maine Climate Corps to provide opportunities for members to meet professionals in the field, and to provide opportunities for AmeriCorps members to meet and collaborate with other members working on different projects in the same geographic area. I collaborated with a variety of AmeriCorps members in the Lake Tahoe area, and volunteered on trail-building projects hosted by AmeriCorps members with the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. Wherever possible, AmeriCorps projects should include an element of outreach and market development, to increase the demand for workers with the skillset that the AmeriCorps members are learning and

developing. This will make the Maine Climate Corps an effective job training program and create new career paths implementing climate solutions throughout the state.

We would also recommend that the state allocate funding to local non-profit organizations to provide a portion of the matching funds required to host AmeriCorps members. This will ease the difficulty of fundraising for new AmeriCorps programs, and accelerate the deployment and success of the Maine Climate Corps.

Thank you Representative Rielly for bringing this forward.

We ask this committee to vote
LD 722 Ought to Pass.