



The Committee on State and Local Government
Testimony from Katherine Howell, Program Director, Educate Maine

In Support Of

L.D. 1010 “An Act to Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program”

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, distinguished members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Katherine Howell, Program Director at Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. 1010.

Educate Maine’s mission is to ensure that Maine people are prepared to succeed in education and career and that all Maine people reach their highest educational potential. As a member of the MaineSpark coalition, we measure this by attainment - the share of adult workers with a postsecondary credential of value in demand by Maine employers. Maine’s goal is to reach 60% by 2025.

Maine continues to rank as the oldest state in the nation and our future prosperity depends on our ability to attract and retain talent from both within and outside our borders. Maine’s 10-year Economic Development Strategy specifies that “Maine needs to add at least 75,000 people to our workforce over the next ten years.” To attract and retain that many people into our workforce we must begin to think and strategize differently.

We know that everything that makes Maine distinct—from its natural beauty to its heritage industries—is a selling point for new talent. Our focus should be on building new pathways to get talent to Maine. Through my work at Educate Maine I see first-hand that once we get talent to Maine and expose them to our communities and professional opportunities the retention comes naturally.

In summer 2020, I had the privilege of working with over 300 students engaged in career exploration through the FocusMaine Intern Experience program. Two students’ stories resonated with me as I considered this bill. The first is an international student who came to the United States and Maine on a scholarship to play basketball. He built a community among his team and the college, but it was when he began working at a regional bank over the summer that he found a passion for Maine and his career. This is when he saw his future being built here in our state. He has continued beyond his summer internship as a part-time employee throughout his senior year with plans to join the organization after graduation. It is stories like

these that make it clear: **engaging young professionals in our extensive professional network across Maine is what will drive the talent pipeline growth our state needs over the next ten years.**

Another student I worked with this past summer was also from out of state, coming to community college to study Marine Science from Minnesota. She had a small connection to Maine through stories her grandmother told of the northeast coast. She accepted an internship in the summer of 2020 at a local research organization and made industry contacts and connections that have continued to fuel her interest in staying in Maine following graduation. She recently shared this statement, “If employers can identify the talent they want and advertise that to students in Maine looking for work experience, there’s a great opportunity to create success for the intern, the employer—and Maine as a whole.”

Today’s young people have the world open to them, the opportunity to go anywhere. Programs like the proposed Maine Service Fellows program makes it easier for new and eager talent to join our workforce, see the opportunities Maine has to offer, and let them experience our community and natural beauty first-hand. Creating more pathways for young career professionals to live and work in Maine is critical to the future of our state and economy. This bill will support young people looking to build community and move to Maine to explore the opportunities we have to offer. I encourage you to pass this bill in support of Maine’s workforce.

Sincerely,

Katherine Howell
Educate Maine

Further Resources

- [Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029](#)
- [FocusMaine 2020 Highlights and Impact Review](#), pages 11-12