



**Testimony of the Island Institute in Support of LD 1010, An Act to Establish the Maine Service Fellows Program
April 7th, 2021**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Nick Battista, and I am offering this testimony on behalf of the Island Institute in support of LD 1010.

The Island Institute is a 38-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We work to sustain Maine's island and coastal communities and are committed to a just, resilient, and vibrant future for the coast of Maine. We work in partnership with courageous leaders to support resilient communities and confront a changing world. The Island Institute's community development work focuses on: the marine economy, climate and energy pilots, small business, education, and leadership. Broadband is foundational to all of this work, and all Mainers need to have the ability to use high-speed, reliable internet.

Seventy-five percent of Maine's coastal communities have fewer than 3,500 people, and 25 percent of coastal communities have fewer than 800 people. Further, as the [Maine Won't Wait](#) climate action plan from the Maine Climate Council notes, only 11 percent of Maine communities have a town planner on staff, and 72 percent have no local planner and insufficient or no regional planning support. Throughout our state, rural communities face significant capacity challenges to building community and economic resilience.

As an organization that supports community and economic development work in some of the state's most remote communities, we regularly see the difference an extra set of hands can make. In the last 20 years, we have placed 135 Island Fellows in 27 rural communities. Collectively, these fellows have contributed about 350,000 hours of direct technical assistance to community-identified projects.

We have seen the impact that comes from this much-needed support and a fresh perspective. In communities where every leader wears multiple hats, having a fellow who can focus on a singular project helps address one critical need and frees up community capacity to tackle other issues. The benefits of a fellow also extend well beyond their official work and can have a significant impact on the community as a whole. As one current fellow recently told us, "My favorite part about being a fellow is seeing the ripple effect my work has on the community."

The proposed Maine Service Fellows program sets up a flexible structure that will enable small, rural, capacity-constrained communities to benefit from an extra set of hands, so that they can work to address some of the critical issues they face. I urge you to establish this program in support of Maine's rural communities.