

Senator Saviello, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Gabrielle Cooper, I am a resident of Pittston, and a senior at Gardiner Area High School. I am testifying today in support of LD 894, An Act To Increase Funding for the Youth Conservation Corps.

I worked for Midcoast Conservancy's Youth Conservation Corps last summer in the Damariscotta Lake area. I was looking for a job that was unique as well as educational, and YCC afforded me that exact opportunity. I enjoyed 2 months of incredibly rewarding work fashioning rubber razors and infiltration stairs, as well as maintaining various trails. The homeowners that I met were very welcoming, and their dedication to the environment was inspiring. I returned home after each day of work with the realization that I had done something to better my community and had a new story to share with my parents.

While I remain undecided on what major I'd like to pursue in college and what I'd like to do for an eventual career, my YCC experience was instrumental in the planning of my future. I will be attending Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire next year, and I wrote one of my essays about the skills and confidence that working for the YCC program gave me. I am absolutely certain that this essay was an integral part of being accepted to my dream school. Additionally, the time I spent outside, enjoying the natural beauty of the Damariscotta Lake area, made me realize that I want to join Dartmouth's Outing Club and take part in hiking, skiing, and biking trips during my time

in college. I also hope to volunteer with environmental efforts both during college and throughout the rest of my adult life.

Youth Conservation Corps programs across the state of Maine are, of course, a great asset to the environment. Furthermore, they can have immeasurable impact in the lives of young people, just like my YCC experience did for me. This influence creates a ripple effect, encouraging other high schoolers to seek out their own YCC employment, and ensuring that past YCC crew members continue to care for and have a positive impact on their environment.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my support for this bill. Both Maine's environment and youth will benefit from it. Thank you all for your time.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Cooper
Gardiner Area High School Senior
Former YCC Employee