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National Service: Improving Current National Service Policies and Processes

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Chairman Heck, Vice Chair Wada, Vice Chair Gearan, and Commissioners,

Thank you for inviting me to testify today on a very important topic to our agency and the nation. I am honored to be here to discuss the vital contributions of our national service members, their impact on critical challenges, and ways to strengthen national service to increase access, impact, and sustainability.

It is fitting this hearing is taking place at the Bush School of Government and Public Service. President Bush was a lifelong public servant who understood that service is an enduring American value and the hallmark of a successful life. By launching Points of Light and signing the 1990 National Service Act, he ushered in the modern era of national service and set the stage for the creation of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the agency I am honored to lead today.

We are grateful to President Bush, Barbara Bush, and the Bush family for their extraordinary contributions to service and volunteering, and are proud to carry this legacy forward by engaging Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to their communities.

I'd like to thank each of you for your military, national, and public service to the country, and for the dedication you bring to this important assignment. You have been given a big charge: examining three large systems of service that engage millions of Americans; exploring how they can be improved and work better together; and finding ways to unleash the extraordinary power of service to meet national needs and strengthen our democracy.

We know you have traveled many miles, read many briefs, and talked to countless citizens in church basements, city halls, military barracks, and community centers across the country - places where the greatness of America is on display through acts of service that are the hallmark of our nation.

As the federal agency for national service and volunteering, we share your vision of inspiring and encouraging more Americans to serve. Since the Commission first opened its doors, we have shared information, exchanged ideas, and connected you to AmeriCorps and Senior Corps projects around the country. We are thankful that you have had the opportunity to see national service in action and meet our AmeriCorps members, Senior Corps volunteers, and nonprofit, faith-based, and State Commission partners that make national service such a success in communities nationwide.

As CEO, I am privileged to work with a talented team of professionals at CNCS and alongside extraordinary, mission-driven leaders in our field and the committed individuals who serve in our programs. I'd like to start my testimony by giving an overview of our programs, the principles behind their success, and the positive impact national service has on individuals, communities, and the nation.

NATIONAL SERVICE OVERVIEW

For the past 25 years, CNCS has leveraged our nation's greatest resource—the American people—to get things done. Working hand in hand with thousands of local partners, our national service programs improve lives, expand opportunity, bolster civil society, and strengthen communities.

Through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, 300,000 trained and dedicated citizens serve in 50,000 locations across the country, helping millions of Americans succeed in school, prepare for 21st century jobs, live independently, and rebuild their lives after homelessness, job loss, or natural disasters. National service addresses national needs and Trump Administration priorities to combat the opioid crisis, promote economic mobility, close the skills gap, prevent elder abuse, and support veterans and their families.

- **AmeriCorps** engages approximately 75,000 men and women in results-driven service each year at more than 21,000 locations including nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based organizations across the country. AmeriCorps members help communities tackle pressing problems while mobilizing millions of volunteers for the organizations they serve. Members gain valuable professional, educational, and life skills. AmeriCorps consists of three programs: AmeriCorps State and National, whose members serve with nonprofit and community groups across the country; AmeriCorps VISTA, through which members serve full-time building the capacity of organizations addressing poverty; and AmeriCorps NCCC, a team-based residential program for young adults 18-24 who develop leadership skills and strengthen communities by serving in public safety, environmental, youth development, and disaster relief and preparedness.
- **Senior Corps** taps the skills, talents, and experience of more than 220,000 Americans age 55 and over to meet a wide range of community needs through three programs. Foster Grandparents serve one-on-one as tutors and mentors to at-risk youth. RSVP volunteers respond to natural disasters, deliver meals, connect veterans to benefits, teach drug prevention, renovate homes, and more. Senior Companions help frail seniors and other adults live with independence and dignity in their own homes. Research shows that consistent volunteering can improve the health and well-being of people age 55 and over. After two years of service, 84 percent of Senior Corps volunteers reported improved or stable health; 88 percent reported a decrease in feelings of isolation; and 78 percent reported they felt less depressed.
- CNCS also builds the capacity of America's voluntary sector by funding Governor-appointed State Service Commissions, strengthening volunteer management and sharing best practices through the Volunteer Generation Fund; conducting research on volunteering trends and demographics, and leading national days of service on Martin Luther King Day and 9/11.

National service is built on a set of smart, common-sense principles:

- **Sustained Service Commitment:** AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers are dedicated citizens who make an intensive, sustained commitment to service, often a year or more. They serve in difficult conditions to meet important needs because they want to be there. Given their sustained commitment, they can take on complex assignments, assume leadership roles, and deliver results, helping nonprofits and local agencies increase their reach and impact.
- **State and Local Control:** Governors play a key role in deciding where national service resources go in their own state, with three-fourths of AmeriCorps funding overseen by Governor-appointed State Service Commissions. Organizations selected for AmeriCorps and Senior Corps funding are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and supervising their participants. CNCS works closely with city, county, and tribal officials to identify needs and deploy resources to meet them. Local officials see national service as a valued partner, as shown by the participation of more than 5,200 officials representing 216 million Americans in last year's National Service Recognition Day.
- **Public-Private Partnership:** National service programs annually generate more than \$1.26 billion in outside resources from businesses, foundations, public agencies, and other sources – an amount that exceeds the federal appropriation of our agency. Some of the nation's largest companies – and thousands of small businesses, community foundations, and local agencies - invest in national service through match or in-kind support. This investment strengthens community impact and increases the return on taxpayer dollars, making national service a highly cost-effective strategy to meet local needs.
- **Impact-Driven and Evidence-Based.** Organizations that participate in national service must measure performance and demonstrate results. Our programs invest in evidence-based interventions while leaving room for new and innovative models. By focusing on evidence and results, we are better able to measure the success of our programs, share best practices, and maximize the return on the public investment.

A Powerful Return on Investment

When trained and dedicated national service members provide intensive service through local organizations focused on impact, everyone wins. National service provides a quadruple bottom line return on investment, benefitting the recipients of service, the people who serve, their sponsor organizations, and the larger community and nation.

1) National Service Improves Lives

AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers improve the lives of our most vulnerable citizens, and the impacts are proven and measurable.

- **Education:** National service members support millions of students, helping them stay in school, improve academic performance, and graduate prepared for college and career. They serve in almost 12,000 schools, including 1 of every 4 low-performing schools and 1 of every 10 charter schools. Rigorous independent evaluations have demonstrated the positive impact of national

service on early childhood education, third-grade literacy, college access, and other measures of educational success.

- **Economic Opportunity:** By building affordable housing, providing financial literacy training, connecting returning veterans to jobs, preventing elder fraud, reducing recidivism, and building capacity of job training programs, national service members increase economic opportunity and build family stability.
- **Disaster Response:** National service members provide critical support after floods, fires, hurricanes and other natural and man-made disasters; operating shelters and hotlines, managing volunteers, mucking and gutting homes, supporting long-term recovery, and more. Last year AmeriCorps NCCC members assisted more than 1.4 million disaster survivors.
- **Veterans and Military Families:** National service members provide employment services, benefits counseling, transportation, and other support to nearly 450,000 veterans and military families each year. Approximately 20,000 veterans serve in CNCS programs, applying the leadership skills and training they gained in the military to tackle problems on the homefront.
- **Healthy Futures:** Senior Corps volunteers and AmeriCorps members address hunger and homelessness, serve in health clinics, provide nutrition education, and help 380,000 homebound seniors live independently each year. In response to the opioid epidemic, 2,300 national service members supported opioid and substance abuse prevention, reduction, and recovery efforts last year.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** National service members build trails, restore parks, protect watersheds, support wildland fire mitigation, promote energy efficiency, run recycling programs, and promote energy efficiency, weatherization, and clean energy.

2) National Service Expands Opportunity for Those Who Serve

While helping others, AmeriCorps members help themselves, gaining valuable skills to jumpstart their careers and earning money to further their education. Since 1994, more than 1.1 million individuals have served in AmeriCorps, earning \$3.7 billion in scholarships to pay for college or technical school or repay student loans at a time of rising college costs and significant student debt.

National service is also a proven pathway to 21st century workforce skills and careers. AmeriCorps members gain valuable career skills and experience to prepare them for careers. Those skills are both specific to their service activity (teaching, STEM, firefighting) and general skills of leadership, project management, working with diverse groups, and problem-solving that all employers are looking for. This pathway is especially critical for low-income young adults facing the toughest prospects for employment.

Research has found that 80 percent of alumni say AmeriCorps benefited their career path, and 42 percent of alumni employed within six months of service found a job through AmeriCorps. Research also shows that national service helps create new jobs. Findings from an Arizona State University study found that 82 percent of AmeriCorps host organizations hired at least one AmeriCorps member. The positions are typically full-time, and more than half the jobs are newly created.

More than 580 companies and organizations with 2.3 million employees have become [Employers of National Service](#), expressing their interest in recruiting AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni into their workforce. These employers - including Disney, Accenture, Sodexo, Timberland and CSX, the

states of Virginia and Montana, and multiple federal agencies - know that AmeriCorps alumni are dedicated, talented, and mission-driven leaders and they want more of them on their teams.

Serving in AmeriCorps has other important long-term benefits. Ninety percent of AmeriCorps alumni surveyed report that their national service experience improved their ability to solve problems. AmeriCorps alumni are more likely than the average adult to attain a bachelor's degree or higher. And 79 percent of AmeriCorps alumni are, or plan to become, actively involved in their community after service, compared to 47 percent prior to service.

3) National Service Strengthens America's Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector

AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers serve in more than 50,000 locations across the country including schools, food banks, homeless shelters, youth centers, and veteran's facilities – helping nonprofit and faith-based organizations expand their reach and impact through their direct service and by mobilizing volunteers. Last year, AmeriCorps members recruited, trained, and supervised more than 2.3 million volunteers for the organizations they serve. AmeriCorps VISTA members leveraged more than \$194 million in-cash and in-kind resources, increasing the capacity of the organizations they serve to fight poverty.

4) National Service Strengthens and Unites Communities

At the community level, CNCS programs and their members create positive change with real numbers that reflect their contributions to society. The University of Texas at Austin found national service programs strengthen the overall health of communities, and citizens express fewer negative sentiments in communities with AmeriCorps programming. Research shows that many communities with higher levels of civic engagement are likely to have higher educational achievement, better governmental institutions, faster economic growth, and less crime.

While difficult to quantify, national service has another important benefit. By bringing people of different races, religious beliefs, and economic backgrounds together to pursue common goals, national service helps unite communities. Like the military, national service provides a shared civic experience that can provide a sense of purpose, appreciation for a diverse community, and fuel a love of country.

IMPROVING NATIONAL SERVICE: TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Our system of national service is a national treasure. As CEO, my top priority is to make it stronger and more sustainable.

Supporting our large and decentralized system of national service, helping our members and volunteers increase their impact, and building a sustainable future requires a strong, high-performing federal agency. It requires a clear vision and set of priorities and an organizational structure that maximizes the talents of staff. And it requires systems and processes that reduce burdens on our grantees and projects so they can focus doing their best work.

That is why we developed our [**Transformation and Sustainability Plan**](#). This plan makes long overdue improvements to expand access, improve customer service, strengthen community impact, build long-term sustainability, and position national service for future growth. The plan is built around six goals:

- Strengthening core business functions
- Streamlining the application process
- Prioritizing evidence-based interventions
- Simplifying and strengthening our brand
- Strengthening and aligning grants management and monitoring to improve efficiencies and maximize effectiveness
- Aligning our workforce and workplaces to better serve our customers, meet evolving needs, and ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

These goals were developed following months of intensive review of our operations and programs. This process took into account a wide range of ideas and recommendations from staff, grantees, national service members, the Office of Management and Budget, Congress, the CNCS Office of the Inspector General, and the Government Accountability Office, and evaluations and reports which noted the need for CNCS to implement significant changes to how we conduct business.

Since the announcement of the plan, I have spent time listening to our staff, grantees and project sponsors, and other stakeholders across the country seeking feedback and requesting ideas for accomplishing the plan's goals. CNCS hosted seven in-person and teleconference listening sessions attended by more than 500 individuals, met with many national and community service stakeholders, and received written comments from more than 260 individuals and organizations. My team and I have also met with nearly 100 Members of Congress or their staff to discuss our plan, and we continue to seek input from grantees, projects, and other stakeholders to inform our ongoing implementation because we value their insights and expertise.

Overall, the input we received has reaffirmed my belief that this plan puts CNCS on the right path. It has also underscored the importance of operationalizing these changes in smart ways that strengthen the amazing work being done by grantees and project sponsors. This plan will not change our important mission and commitment to getting things done in communities across the country, nor will it reduce program funds that flow into states and communities. Rather, it will strengthen the foundation of our decentralized service delivery model to ensure CNCS can support the future growth of national service.

Let me briefly share some key components.

Our first goal is to strengthen and improve core business functions, including our IT systems, accounting, and compliance with grant requirements. These changes will increase capacity across operational areas and better support the work of our grantees. Four months ago we made an important step by announcing a new vendor to support grantee compliance with National Service Criminal History Checks. Over time, we expect this vendor will not only improve compliance, but reduce the burden on grantees in complying with this process and increase efficiencies in monitoring.

Steps to simplify processes and reduce burdens are taking place across CNCS. In January, Senior Corps implemented a long-awaited rule that significantly reduces administrative burdens and duplicative work for sponsors. AmeriCorps State and National has taken numerous steps to increase flexibility, including eliminating the 20-member minimum, streamlining the grant application and

performance measures, making changes to support fixed price grants, increasing the minimum living allowance and cost per Member Service Year; and others. AmeriCorps VISTA's new quarterly deadlines for Concept Papers provide more opportunity and timing certainty for organizations to apply for VISTA members. By increasing flexibility and reducing administrative burdens, grantees and sponsors can better focus on meeting needs in communities.

In addition to streamlining requirements on existing grantees, we are also working to make it easier for new organizations get in the door. Through our plan, we are working to simplify the existing application to provide interested organizations with a single point of entry that identifies all potential resources. This change will make it easier for organizations to access our resources and allow us to support a broader mix of organizations.

Another goal of our plan is to increase investment in evidence-based interventions. Historically, CNCS has not been prescriptive in the types of interventions it funds beyond identifying areas of need. CNCS now has more than two decades of experience and research data that help identify the most impactful interventions across its programs. Going forward, our goal is to target resources to those interventions that have demonstrated success based on data and evidence. I want to emphasize this a directional goal. During our listening sessions, we heard concerns about implementation of this goal due to inadequate resources or lack of evidence-based models, and CNCS will continue to identify and invest in innovative approaches to address local needs.

In its interim report, the Commission called national service “America's best-kept secret,” noting how service in AmeriCorps or Senior Corps can be a life-changing experience – for those who know about it. Our members and volunteers do amazing and powerful work. But all too often that service is not associated with the agency or programs that make it possible. Senator John McCain understood this challenge. In 2001, he wrote, “AmeriCorps members often take on the identity of the organizations they're assigned to. In the process, they often lose any sense of being part of a larger national service enterprise, if they ever had it at all. It's no wonder most Americans say they have never heard of the program.”

Awareness about national service is growing, but we have a long way to go, and we can't do it alone. An important goal of our plan is to simplify and strengthen our brand, and work with our grantees, members, and volunteers to carry that brand far and wide into communities to help the American people better understand and participate in our programs.

The Transformation and Sustainability Plan also moves from 46 small state offices to eight regional offices, and creates new grants monitoring and management roles to improve consistency and strengthen continuity in our operations. These changes will allow CNCS to:

- Create a simplified point of contact to help organizations navigate the full menu of national service programs and to administer grants. Under our current operating model, programs are siloed and grantees and sponsors interact with multiple individuals for a single grant, often resulting in inconsistent information and duplication of work.
- Provide more consistent and equitable service. Today, CNCS program officers' workloads vary significantly depending on location and stream of service. The more balanced workloads made possible with a regional structure will lead to more consistent and higher levels of service for

grantees, sponsors, and communities – and ensure national service investments go to where they are needed rather than where we have staff capacity.

- Enable our agency to keep more resources in the field supporting our grantees, sponsors, and local communities. Our existing 46 state offices – 74 percent of which have three or fewer people – are becoming more costly to maintain due to rent increases, new federal technology requirements, security, and other infrastructure costs. This leaves CNCS with a choice to support real estate infrastructure or to have more staff to support the impact and growth of national service.

While implementing the Transformation and Sustainability Plan remains our agency’s top priority to strengthen national service, we are always looking for opportunities to make improvements.

MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

Much has changed in our communities and nation since the legislation creating AmeriCorps and CNCS was signed into law 25 years ago. We have seen extraordinary advances in technology, major demographic changes, a more globalized economy that has altered the nature of work, the emergence of new social problems, and other changes that weren’t even imaginable a quarter century ago. Every organization or enterprise needs to adapt to change, and national service is no exception.

Several current trends also make this an ideal time to reimagine and strengthen national service for the future:

- Government officials at all levels are looking for ways to address challenges at a time of fiscal constraint, and are increasingly interested in national service as a cost-effective approach to meet local needs.
- There is strong and growing interest in corporate social responsibility and community investing within America’s private sector, with new business models emerging that have a focus on doing good.
- Americans of all ages want to serve, with the impulse toward service is a defining characteristic of millennials and immense potential to tap the experience of our aging population for social good.
- New forms of philanthropy including social investing, venture philanthropy, and social impact bonds offer new avenues to grow service.
- Technological advances including AI, blockchain, and IoT and automation present new opportunities and challenges for national service.

Given the strong foundation of national service, its proven impact in communities, and the strong bipartisan support it has earned, this is a moment of opportunity to reimagine and strengthen national service for the future. Listed below are a number of ideas and initiatives for improving national service. These include some initiatives we are currently working on, some we would like to be working on, and some that may require legislative change. The Administration currently does not have a legislative agenda for national service, so legislative items are included for discussion purposes.

We commend the excellent work by Commission staff to develop a wide range of policy ideas in the staff memorandum. While my testimony does not address the multiple proposals in the memorandum, we are interested in further exploring these ideas. In order to provide the Commission with a more thorough analysis, we are convening a working group at CNCS to review proposals the Commission is considering. This working group will be available over the coming weeks and months to provide technical assistance as you continue to develop your recommendations.

I will start with four areas that have great potential to strengthen and expand national service: reimagining the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, expanding public-private partnerships, unleashing the power of older Americans, and increased collaboration between military and national service.

REIMAGINING THE EDUCATION AWARD TO INCREASE CHOICE, USAGE, AND VALUE:

Higher education remains the single-most important investment that Americans can make in their futures, increasing their potential earnings and lowering their risk of unemployment. The [Segal AmeriCorps Education Award](#) is an crucial benefit that makes higher education or vocational training more accessible and affordable. Since 1994, AmeriCorps alumni have earned more than \$3.7 billion in education awards to advance their education by paying for college or paying off student loans.

Several trends make it an opportune time to consider how the education award can be modernized and enhanced:

- The rising cost of college education and the accompanying growth in student debt has made college more difficult to afford, and the education award doesn't go nearly as far as it used to.
- New CNCS research on education award usage by different demographic groups points to policy and programmatic changes that would increase usage rates.
- Our workforce needs in a global economy are rapidly changing, and young people may be interested in alternative paths to careers beyond the traditional two or four-year college degree.

Following are several reform ideas to provide greater freedom of choice, increase usage rates, decrease burdens, and better support Americans in pursuing the course of education that is best for their future careers.

- **Broadening the Institutions Where the Education Award Can Be Used:**
Currently the education award may be used to pay educational expenses at eligible post-secondary institutions or to repay qualified students loans. Eligible institutions are institutions of higher education and eligible vocational schools that currently participate in the Department of Education's Title IV student aid programs. The Serve America Act expanded the use of the award to include enrolling in courses, programs of education, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training programs that have been approved under the Montgomery and the Post 9/11 G.I. Bills ("G.I. Bill approved program"). However, the option of using the education award for "GI-Only Programs" is restricted to veterans who completed service during a particular time period.

Removing this restriction would give more freedom of choice to AmeriCorps alumni –veterans and non-veterans alike - to pursue their desired education path, as intended by Congress.

- Extend Transferability of the Education Award to AmeriCorps VISTA:
The Serve America Act authorized AmeriCorps State and National members 55 and older to transfer an award to a child, grandchild or foster child. The transfer authority is currently not available to AmeriCorps VISTA members. Allowing VISTA members to have the same option would increase usage of the education award, make national service more attractive to older Americans, simplify member benefits across AmeriCorps programs, and support the higher education aspirations of young people across the United States.
- Provide Comparable Tax Treatment as Other Federal Education Awards:
Unlike the G.I. Bill, Pell Grant, and other federal education awards, the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award is subject to federal taxation, which can create an unanticipated burden for those who have served their country. Removing this burden would allow AmeriCorps alumni to use more of their award to pay for higher education or vocational training, treat AmeriCorps education awards similarly to other federal education awards, and make national service more attractive because of the increased value of this post-service benefit.
- Encourage Institutions to Match the Education Award and Provide Credit for AmeriCorps Service:
More than 180 institutions of higher education - including the Bush School of Government and Public Service and Metropolitan State University of Denver led by Commissioner Davidson – provide matching scholarship funding to AmeriCorps alumni attending their institutions. These institutions recognize that AmeriCorps alumni are committed to civic engagement, equipped to solve problems, and ready to assume leadership roles. A concerted outreach effort could significantly expand the number of colleges and universities offering matching incentives to AmeriCorps alumni. Similarly, more colleges and universities could provide credit recognizing the significant skills and knowledge gained during AmeriCorps service. Providing credit gives students the option to complete their education more quickly, one of the most effective ways to reduce student debt.

Consideration should also be given to piloting other uses of the education award to meet the changing nature of work and needs of today’s workforce. These uses could include apprenticeships, job training, workforce development programs, or other non-traditional approaches that provide credentials, certification, and skills needed for high-demand fields.

LEVERAGING THE PRIVATE AND PHILANTHOPIC SECTOR

The President’s Principles for the Commission highlight the importance military, national, and public service support systems being “grounded in fiscal sustainability to ensure long-term viability and reliability to the Nation.” National service is a model of public-private partnership, with more than \$1.26 billion in outside resources generated each year from private businesses, foundations, and other sources. These investments increase community impact, stretch the federal dollar, and help companies meet their social responsibility goals. Given the many benefits to communities and the private sector, a concerted effort should be made to expand these private sector partnerships.

National service is a pathway to employment that helps participants gain valuable career skills and experience to prepare them for work. Young people are interested in how their post-secondary choices will affect their chances in the job market. While more than 580 organizations with 2.3 million employees have become Employers of National Service, this is a modest number that could significantly increase. National business or human resources associations with large memberships could use their networks to get the word out and encourage members to hire national service alumni. This is especially important now, when our economy is so strong, and companies are having difficulty attracting the best talent.

TAPPING THE IMMENSE POTENTIAL OF OLDER AMERICANS

CNCS strongly believes in the critical role that older Americans play in meeting national and local needs through citizen service. Americans are living longer and healthier lives, and our population is aging. This opens up incredible opportunities to tap the wisdom and experience of older Americans to meet pressing challenges. Increasing senior service also benefits those who serve, as our research shows that people who volunteer lead longer and healthier lives.

The three Senior Corps programs - Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP – provide significant benefits for communities and those who serve, and there is great potential for expanding service opportunities to tap the lifetime of skills and experience of older Americans to solve problems. We encourage the Commission to include Senior Corps in your final report.

- **Authority to Allow Competitive Grantmaking for Senior Corps Programs**

Senior Corps volunteers improve educational outcomes for at-risk and special needs youth, connect veterans and military families to needed services, respond to disasters, and help low-income seniors stay in their homes and avoid costly institutional care. CNCS does not currently have the authority to compete grants in the Senior Companion Program and Foster Grandparent Program, and has limited authority for competing RSVP grants. While Senior Corps grants were competitive when first awarded, certain provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 allow continuous, non-competitive renewal of program grants. Competitive grantmaking increases the impact of federal appropriations, drives innovation and accountability for outcomes, and encourages the use of evidence-based models. CNCS would implement competition carefully in order to support grantees in making the transition and not disrupt current services.

- **Increase the Stipend for Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Volunteers:**

The modest stipend that Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions receive is an important benefit that has not kept up with the times. Since volunteers in these programs are low-income, the stipend is often used for food, medicine or other daily expenses. Consideration should be given to increasing the stipend and providing an indexing mechanism so legislation isn't required to adjust the stipend amount.

MILITARY AND NATIONAL SERVICE COLLABORATION ON RECRUITMENT:

Given its mandate to look at three systems of service, the Commission is ideally suited to recommending ways to better connect military, national, and public service. CNCS is interested in exploring how our agency can collaborate with branches of the military service and the Peace Corps

in the area of marketing and recruitment. Such collaboration could strengthen recruitment efforts of all parties, engage more Americans in service and help reduce the military civilian divide.

- Conduct a Joint Military and National Service Recruitment Pilot:
CNCS would be interested in a pilot project in a certain city or geographic area to test ideas and approaches for combined recruiting efforts for military service, AmeriCorps, and Peace Corps.
- Provide Information on Service Opportunities for Unqualified Armed Forces Applicants:
CNCS would like to work with the Department of Defense on an initiative to provide information about AmeriCorps service opportunities to individuals who have expressed interest in serving their country in the military, but for a variety of reasons, were not qualified to do so because they were unable to meet physical requirements, educational requirements, or they have a disability. These individuals have already shown a desire to serve their country and may be interested in serving in a national service program if they were presented information about available opportunities.
- Provide Information on Service Opportunities to Young Adults Registering for Selective Service:
As the Commission continues its review of the Selective Service System, we encourage you to consider the idea of sharing a mailer to registrants with basic information about options for serving your country including military, national, and public service including AmeriCorps and Peace Corps.

OTHER IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES

- Strengthen The Pathway From National To Public Service By Expanding Non-Competitive Eligibility to All Full-Time AmeriCorps Alumni:
With one third of career civilian employees eligible to retire by 2019, the federal government needs a strategy to hire the new federal workforce. AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni are talented, leaders with transferable skills, work experience in areas aligned with agency missions, and a commitment to public service. Federal agencies currently have authority to use non-competitive eligibility to hire returning Peace Corps and AmeriCorps VISTA members. However, that authority does not extend to other full-time AmeriCorps members. Consideration should be given to expanding non-competitive eligibility to all full-time AmeriCorps alumni. Taking this step will increase the attractiveness of both national and public service, help the federal government recruit more talented employees, and increase the return on the investment of federal training and support dollars by having more AmeriCorps alumni enter federal service. Federal agencies have other authorities, including the Public Lands Corps Act, that allow them to bring on diverse, talented young people in a more expedited way.
- Provide Flexibility for Voluntary 180-Day Extension of AmeriCorps Service Terms:
Currently, some AmeriCorps members' terms expire while they are actively engaged in disaster-response activities. By providing flexibility to extend currently serving members 180 days beyond their term, AmeriCorps NCCC and AmeriCorps State and National grantees could leverage the skills, training, and experience of members to continue providing disaster services and meet other critical needs, reducing the gap in services in impacted communities.

- Authority to Extend AmeriCorps NCCC Term Up to 15 Months:
This flexibility will enable AmeriCorps NCCC members to remain deployed beyond their one year term of service in order to leverage their skills and experience, without requiring the member to graduate and reenroll. This would reduce the gap in services provided by AmeriCorps NCCC members in impacted communities. The change in the maximum service term will also provide the needed flexibility to implement a 12-month service program to provide a year of specialized experience to develop workforce skills to increase job competitiveness after graduation.
- Provide Flexibility on AmeriCorps NCCC Upper Age Limit for Short-Term Deployments:
AmeriCorps NCCC currently has authority to call back recently graduated alumni to serve on short deployments in impacted areas leveraging their prior training and experience. However, that authority is limited to alumni ages 18-24. By raising the upper age limit from 24 to 26, AmeriCorps NCCC would have a larger pool of recently graduated alumni to draw from, increasing NCCC's response capabilities and expanding positive impact in communities.
- Increase Participation of Opportunity Youth:
CNCS believes that youth across all demographics should have the opportunity to participate in national service. Service in AmeriCorps provides key employment and educational benefits to opportunity youth – the millions of young people who are out of school and out of work - and other under-served young adults – expanding opportunity and providing a pathway to employment and continuing education. CNCS is interested in the Commission's policy and programmatic ideas for increasing the participation of opportunity youth in national service.
- Develop Marketing Materials for Parents about Benefits of National Service:
Parents are often the most important influencers in the post-secondary choices of their children. To encourage more participation in service, specific messages and materials need to be shared through the media, high schools and college guidance offices, religious organizations, and other networks that reach parents. Young people – and their parents – should have the opportunity to learn and be inspired by the wide range of opportunities in military, national, and public service. Additional work is needed to provide information about national service to high school and college guidance counselors.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, America's greatness comes from the extraordinary acts of ordinary citizens. For nearly 25 years, CNCS has tapped the ingenuity and can-do spirit of the American people to solve local problems.

We look forward to working with you to strengthen this foundation and create more opportunities for Americans to serve their communities and strengthen our nation.

Thank you again for the invitation to testify today. I am happy to respond to your questions.