



**Testimony before the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
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National Service Hearing: Creating More National Service Opportunities

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Chairman Heck and distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Jaime Uzeta and I serve as the CEO of Public Allies.

Founded in 1992 as one of the original AmeriCorps programs, Public Allies is a national network of organizations and individuals working to create a more just and equitable world. We do so by developing inclusive leaders, innovating cultures, and transforming communities. We believe that leadership is an action anyone can take, not a role that only a few can hold and that lasting social change can only come when citizens of all backgrounds step up, take responsibility, and work together.

At the core of our work is our 10-month AmeriCorps apprenticeship program, which we implement in 25 cities across across the country. Our apprentices, whom we call “Allies,” are recruited mostly from historically underserved and underrepresented communities. We see as assets young people who are too often defined by deficits, and we empower them to transform their lives, their futures, and their communities. Our Allies are over 80 percent people of color, more than 60 percent women, 60 percent low-income, and 25 percent LGBTQ. Our staff reflects significant racial and ethnic diversity as well.

Our alumni network is 8,000 strong and includes CEOs, heads of foundations, elected officials, and a former First Lady.

Layered Impact

The Public Allies Apprenticeship is a unique AmeriCorps model weaving together five key elements that constitute an experiential journey of self-discovery, professional development, and community service. Those elements include:

1. Practical, on-the-job learning through a paid, full-time nonprofit apprenticeship;
2. Rigorous leadership training;
3. Building community through our cohort model;
4. Mentoring, coaching, and continual self-reflection; and
5. Team service projects.

Allies are placed within a nonprofit organization or government agency where they help build that group's capacity to address a broad range of critical community needs such as youth development, education, workforce development, environmental issues, arts programming, and community health. In the course of service, Allies are responsible for recruiting and engaging upwards of 50,000 volunteers and establishing partnerships with over 4,500 different organizations annually. As a result of their service activities, the collaborations developed, and the additional volunteers engaged, an annual average of 150,000 people are able to receive services that otherwise would not.

For our AmeriCorps members, the service placement serves as a practicum in an entry-level, professional position. Our Members, regardless of socioeconomic background or degree-bearing status are placed in positions that invite them to draw upon their strengths -- such as familiarity with the services being delivered, or the groups being targeted for service -- in order to create a stronger community. With the support of their supervisors and other mentors or coaches, they develop the project management and interpersonal skills required to succeed in professional positions and they begin to identify their own strengths as leaders. Members also develop a sense of collaboration, networking skills, and key relationships that can open doors of opportunity beyond their term of service with Public Allies.

The service being delivered by Allies is enhanced by a rigorous, 200-hour leadership and professional development curriculum addressing topics ranging from career readiness and nonprofit management to group dynamics, conflict resolution, cultural competence, and the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression. This equips Members with the content knowledge necessary to be successful in the nonprofit sector, the soft skills required to succeed in the 21st century workforce, and the opportunity to reflect on how social issues such as poverty, poor education, hunger, and homelessness impact their identities, their service placements, and their communities.

During their term of service, Allies choose whether they want to pursue a challenging career, secondary education, or another term of service after they graduate from the program – charting a pathway that not only offers a tangible trajectory towards economic

mobility for disconnected young people, but also a sense of purpose and self-determination. Ninety percent of the class of 2017-18 reported being connected to a Pathway within 90 days of graduation.

By placing these young adults in positions of leadership within the community, we transform communities from the inside out, changing the way young people who are disconnected and economically disadvantaged are viewed by others, and changing the life trajectory of the individuals who serve. Moreover, Public Allies is helping diversify the talent pipeline for the nonprofit sector, ensuring that future sector leadership is reflective of the faces and interests of those being served. To deepen our impact and the impact of national service, over the next three years Public Allies will be expanding our apprenticeship program, leveraging our alumni network in new ways, and working to multiply the number of diverse leaders solving our country's most pressing challenges.

Increasing National Service Opportunities

Moving forward, we applaud the commission for many of the ideas it is already exploring, such as:

- Increasing the living stipend for those participating in national service programs;
- Encouraging and/or incentivizing colleges and employers to recruit individuals who have completed a service year and to award college credit for national service experience; and
- Providing an expanded educational award for each year of national service completed.

In addition to the ideas above, we encourage the commission to examine how national service can continue to expand its impact in the following ways:

1. Encouraging greater national service participation from underserved communities. Public Allies has consistently advocated for greater diversity of those who serve. For too long, national service has largely been the province of the affluent seeking enrichment by helping those less fortunate. We believe that true change happens when people with the closest proximity to our communities' problems are supported to create solutions informed by their own experience. We should pursue anything that we can to make it possible for youth of less privileged backgrounds to engage in national service. This could include increased support of programs that engage more diverse members.
2. Diversify the types of organizations that can engage with national service. It is imperative that we broaden the number of publicly supported national service

opportunities, so that all who wish to serve can do so. One way we can achieve this is by expanding the types of organizations that can engage Members in federally supported national service programs. New socially-conscious business models, such as social enterprises, have emerged and can be amplified as additional catalysts for change through partnerships with national service. Currently, such businesses are ineligible to host AmeriCorps members.

3. We also encourage the federal government to incentivize the engagement of nontraditional participants in service, such as Opportunity Youth and formerly incarcerated citizens returning communities. These nontraditional participants are often the most overlooked when organizations are seeking volunteer talent. Service programs focusing on this population, such as Public Allies and others, are capable of providing supports necessary to ensure this population of volunteers can find success. However, these delivery models frequently come at a higher average cost per participant, which should be taken into account when making grant decisions.

Conclusion

Over the years we have learned that national service can act as a powerful engine for the self-determination and transformation not only of individuals from underserved backgrounds, but of entire communities. At a time when trust in each other and our institutions is at a historic low, we should do all we can to help renew Americans' faith in the common good.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify about the role of national service in building long-term commitments to communities while also meeting the development needs of our diverse and evolving workforce.

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