



National Association of RSVP Directors

Statement of Ms. Betty Ruth, President of the National Association of RSVP Directors (NARSVPD) to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
June 20, 2019 | Hyde Park, NY

I am submitting comments on two Staff Memoranda – Civic education and Infrastructure to Serve America -- on behalf of NARSVPD and its members.

NARSVPD certainly supports the Commission’s mission “to consider and develop recommendations concerning the need for a military draft, and means by which to foster a greater attitude and ethos of service among American youth,” but cannot emphasize too strongly that the Commission needs to recognize the contribution that Seniors are currently making to our country through service and volunteerism and the potential that Seniors have to help the Commission achieve its stated goals.

RSVP is the largest federally funded volunteer program with more than 200,000 volunteers who serve in more than 600 programs throughout the country (see my August 13, 2018 statement to the Commission). It has the largest rural footprint of any program administered by the Corporation for National Service and at an average cost of \$250 per volunteer it is cost-effective.

I would like to first address the Staff memorandum on An Infrastructure to Serve America. The Voluntary Service registration System (VSRS) that

is discussed identifies several service programs and suggests that the VSRS could identify and facilitate recruitment of candidates to meet their needs. I want to emphasize that virtually all of the tasks these organizations carry out can, and in many cases are, currently being done by Seniors. If the Commission decides to recommend the creation of such a system, it ought to be open to Seniors, as well. Indeed, any attempt at a National Service registry ought to include the opportunity for Seniors to opt in.

With regard to where such a database might be housed, I want to make two points. First, the Trump Administration has proposed to eliminate the Corporation for National and Community Service. If housed at CNCS, the database should be constructed in a way so that it can be easily transferred if, in fact, CNCS is ever eliminated.

Second, given the Corporation's well-documented, and ongoing, problems with IT infrastructure (see **Comments of the Honorable Deborah J. Jeffrey^[SEP], Inspector General, Corporation for National and Community Service Regarding FY 2020 Funding Level for CNCS-OIG**, an attachment to CNCS's FY 2020 Congressional Budget Justification) as well as our recent experience with Criminal History Background Checks (CHC), we believe that CNCS is incapable of managing the database.

The Staff Memorandum on Civic Education also ignores the roles that Seniors can play in creating an expectation of service among Americans of all ages. In this regard, I want to note that the concept of "students" omits those who have completed their formal education but continue to address "personal, community, and national issues" in their daily lives. A true culture of service must include seniors. To be effective, civic education must emphasize that service is the habit of a lifetime.

With regard to policy option (2) to improve the quality and delivery of civic education and service learning, I want to emphasize that RSVP volunteers possess the experience and skills to teach more students civic education. Because RSVP is not means-tested, it can recruit highly educated and experienced seniors. Think of us a potential "Retired Professional Corps" of social studies teachers and civic educators who

can be recruited and deployed in schools at all levels to teach age-appropriate curricula. We could also staff the proposed Mobile Constitution Center just as we currently staff schools, national parks, museums, and other educational institutions as teachers, docents, experiential guides, and mentors.

You note that the country is currently “experiencing an acute teacher shortage, with every state and territory reporting a lack of qualified teachers in at least one academic subject.” How better to address this need than with retired teachers, recruited and placed through RSVP?

NARSVPD appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments. We look forward to working with you to create a culture of service that includes the contributions of Americans of all ages.