

**Statement of Jeanine Nemitz**

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**Prepared for the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service**

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (Commission) in response to the Commission's recent public hearing to discuss the release of two staff memos regarding *an Infrastructure to Serve America* and *Civic Education*. The National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors appreciates the work of the Commission and supports its mission of strengthening American democracy through service.

By way of brief background, the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) began in 1965 by Sargent Shriver as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. The Foster Grandparent Program provides opportunities for low-income Americans age 55 and older to serve children and youth in their community for an average of 15-40 hours each week. Those who meet income limits (200 percent of poverty) qualify for the small, non-taxable stipend reimbursement, transportation assistance, orientation, training opportunities, and a daily meal.

The FGP program began with just 800 volunteers in 45 institutions. The program was then authorized by Title II of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act (DVSA) of 1973, and as amended through the National Service Act of 1990, and the Serve America Act of 2009 authored by Senator Orrin Hatch and the late Senator Edward Kennedy. Since the

program's inception, it has grown across the country to include more than 22,000 Foster Grandparents serving an average of 189,000 children annually through assignments in non-profit organizations, schools, Head Start centers, and residential shelters. The Foster Grandparent Program is one of the three programs housed at the Corporation for National and Community Service that comprises Senior Corps.

The National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors (NAFGPD) is a membership-supported professional organization representing Foster Grandparent Programs nationwide, local sponsoring agencies, and program participants. NAFGPD is currently comprised of 179 members from across the country.

NAFGPD applauds the efforts of the Commission at taking an in-depth look at how as a nation we can encourage increased participation in service. Unfortunately, NAFGPD was disappointed to see that in both recently released staff memos by the Commission, there was no mention of senior volunteers. The focus of both documents was on getting a new generation of Americans to serve. While NAFGPD agrees that it is very important to educate and encourage our nation's youth about the importance of service, but by solely focusing on younger Americans, a real opportunity is missed to harness the collective contributions of an entire generation.

As we have seen firsthand in more than fifty years of the Foster Grandparent Program, senior volunteers can and do play an important role in addressing challenges with our communities. For example, the current Senior Corps programs are helping seniors

continue to live independently in their homes, assist communities during natural disasters, support military families and veterans, and help children in schools and head start programs learn and thrive in an academic and social environment just to name a few.

Not only do senior volunteers provide significant benefits to their communities, but by participating in the Senior Corps service programs, are also seeing benefits in their own lives. The Corporation for National and Community Service recently published the initial findings of longitudinal study examining the health benefits to Senior Corps volunteers. The showed that after just one year of service, Senior Corps volunteers reported the following:

- 46% of volunteers reported improved health and well-being
- 63% of volunteers reported a decrease in a feeling of isolation
- 70% of volunteers who initially reported 5 or more symptoms of depression reported fewer symptoms

NAFGPD applauds the Commission's commitment to service and seeking ways to promote it and asks that as the Commission continues to move forward with its mission and recommendations, that the value senior volunteers bring to their communities be a part of the conversation and that this important group who is currently serving in all 50 states be included in the Commission's effort.