

July 1, 2019

The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck
Commission Chairman
National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000
Arlington, VA 22202

The Honorable Mark Gearan
Vice Chair for National and Public Service
National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000
Arlington, VA 22202

The Honorable Debra Wada
Vice Chair for Military Service
National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000
Arlington, VA 22202

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

Young Invincibles (YI) is a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for young people and amplifying the voices of young people¹ in the political process. Thank you for the opportunity to submit a Statement of Record concerning the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service's (the "Commission") recent work, hearings, and memorandums. This Statement will focus on the "Civic Education" staff memorandum.²

As advocates for young adults, we know that civic engagement and increased participation of young people in the political process is essential to maintaining a healthy American democracy. We are pleased to specifically endorse two recommendations:

1. *Encourage institutions of higher education (IHEs) to take steps to improve the civic health of their communities and the nation.*
2. *Demonstrate a commitment to civic education.*³

¹ Young Invincibles focuses our work on young adults aged 18-34. Unless otherwise stated, the use herein of the phrases "young people" or "young adults" refer to this cohort.

² "Staff Memorandum: Civic Education," National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://inspire2serve.gov/api/files/287>.

³ Ibid, 2.

Both of these recommendations recognize the responsibility that institutions of higher education and other educational authorities have in fostering participation by young adults in the civic and democratic processes.

Several of YI's partner organizations have done research and introduced plans that may further the Commission's recommendations. For example, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education (CIRCLE) coined the term "civic deserts" to describe areas devoid of opportunities for civic and political engagement.⁴ A report co-authored by the National Conference on Citizenship, The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, and Civic Enterprises charted a path forward to address these deserts, including (1) increasing access to quality national history and civic education, (2) expanding national service opportunities, and (3) using technology to increase community engagement and social connectivity.⁵ While the Commission is still considering how much to prescribe at a federal level, this report may be useful as the Commission finalizes its recommendations.

Additionally, our partner Campus Compact has asked campuses to create civic action plans. YI has endorsed these plans, which include strategies to increase student service and democratic participation.⁶ Specifically, these plans often include coordinating with off-campus partners on how to engage responsibly in the community, intentionally marketing civic engagement as a feature of student life on campus, and recognizing and rewarding the connection between civic engagement and academic achievement.⁷ YI believes these plans align with the goals of the Commission and may be helpful in the Commission's ongoing work.

At YI, we too are engaged in ongoing work alongside our partners to address the civic challenges facing our nation. YI leads the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition (SLSV), a group of over 350 non-partisan national, state, local and student organizations dedicated to finding and scaling data-driven approaches to improving democratic engagement among college students.⁸ The SLSV Coalition has implemented and promoted best practices for increasing student democratic engagement, and has created tools and resources to support individual campus' development of democratic engagement action plans specific to their campus context and communities. These plans, which follow the "lead, engage, assess, plan" model, typically include identifying specific campus leaders, coordinating with internal and

⁴ Matthew J. Atwell, John Bridgeland, and Peter Levine, Civic Deserts: America's Civic Health Challenge, (Washington, D.C. and Medford, MA: National Conference on Citizenship, The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, and Civic Enterprises, 2017), 27, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.ncoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017CHIUpdate-FINAL-small.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid, 29-30.

⁶ "Civic Action Plan Library," Campus Compact, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://compact.org/actionstate/ment/civic-action-plans/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "About Us," Students Learn Students Vote, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.studentslearnstudentsvote.org/>.

external partners, measuring campus voting rates, and drafting a plan to improve campus-wide democratic engagement that is then evaluated post-election.⁹

The SLSV Coalition has endeavored to increase college student turnout in the 2020 election by 12 percentage points over college student turnout in 2016. The Coalition will work both at a national and state-based level in order to reach this goal, deepening on-campus networks in order to work collaboratively to increase student turnout. We believe that the Commission's recommendations, in requiring institutions of higher education to plan and demonstrate their commitment to civic action, will help increase democratic and voter participation. We know, as does the Commission, that this increased participation is fundamental in improving our nation's civic health - and that it will take thoughtful strategic planning to achieve these participatory goals.

Finally, we wish to call to the Commission's attention the Help Students Vote Act, designed to address the same problems of civic and democratic engagement that the Commission is targeting. The Act, which builds upon a current provision in the Higher Education Act, would designate a "campus vote coordinator," strengthen requirements for distributing information about voter registration deadlines, and provide enforcement mechanisms to enforce its provisions.¹⁰ The Act has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. While we understand that the Commission may be hesitant to take an official position on current legislation, YI believes that this bill would create increased engagement among young people. This, in turn, would further the Commission's goal of demonstrating commitment to civic education by creating civic-minded citizens likely to make positive impacts on their communities and the nation.

It is clear that the Commission has engaged in substantive, thoughtful, and productive work in creating their recommendations for civic education. YI agrees wholeheartedly that civic education must be made a national priority: not only for the health of America, but for the health of America's young people. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this Statement, and best of luck to the Commission on its continued work. If you have any questions regarding this Statement please reach out to:

Clarissa Unger
Director of Civic Engagement
Young Invincibles

⁹ "The Checklist," Students Learn Students Vote, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.studentslearnstudentsvote.org/the-checklist>.

¹⁰ "Help Students Vote Act Reintroduced in U.S. House & Senate," Young Invincibles, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://younginvincibles.org/help-students-vote-act-reintroduced-in-u-s-house-of-representatives-senate/>.