



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Frederica Wilson (FL-24)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investments

Examining the Policies and Practices of the Corporation for National Community Service

Wednesday, December 14, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, we are meeting to reflect on the important role the Corporation for National and Community Service – better known as AmeriCorps – plays in supporting communities.

The hearing today also meets our oversight responsibility, according to House Rules, to examine AmeriCorps' disclaimed financial audit for Fiscal Year 2022. Although the agency has made some progress since we last met, there is still considerable work to be done to improve the agency's financial management.

We are joined by AmeriCorps' Inspector General, Deborah Jeffery, and the Chief Executive Officer, Michael Smith, to discuss how AmeriCorps can best achieve its mission.

Since AmeriCorps was founded in 1993, it has empowered over one million Americans to provide critical support for the young and old in neighborhoods across the nation.

After Hurricane Katrina, AmeriCorps members helped rebuild homes and neighborhoods. During the Flint Water Crisis, members went door-to-door to deliver water filters. And throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, AmeriCorps was essential in our nation's response and recovery by:

- Helping students through mentoring and reading programs;
- Fighting food insecurity for millions of Americans;
- Providing companionship to homebound seniors to ensure that food, health care, and social services were readily available; and
- Helping coordinate COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

In just the last year, 500 members and volunteers in my district have helped seniors live independently and helped our youth develop literacy skills. And since AmeriCorps' founding, over 4,500 members from my district in Florida have been mobilized, serving more than six million hours.

National service programs not only benefit our communities, but also create a pathway to higher education for thousands of Americans. After serving, members can earn educational awards that allow them to pursue a college degree or trade certificate or pay off student debt. Since 1994, nearly 1.2 million AmeriCorps members have earned more than \$4 billion in education awards.

AmeriCorps is essential for our communities. As a result, the national service programs have consistently received bipartisan support. AmeriCorps was founded under a Democratic president, received record funding levels under a Republican-led Congress, and Presidents Bush, Obama and Biden have all expanded AmeriCorps' capacity and reach.

Despite the importance of the agency and its record of bipartisan support, AmeriCorps cannot reach its full potential until it takes additional steps to improve its management and financial health.

As we'll hear today from our witnesses, AmeriCorps lacks a rigorous financial management program, which has left the agency without the tools to adequately manage grantees and discover and crackdown on bad actors.

Thankfully, since appearing before the Committee last year, the agency has engaged earnestly in a significant amount of work to address the auditors' recommendations. For example, thanks to Mr. Smith and Ms. Jeffery's leadership, the agency's senior leaders and board have made it a priority to focus on addressing the agency's financial management issues, and has engaged outside experts that will strengthen its fiscal and technological modernization.

This work is not only important to ensure that the agency is good stewards of taxpayer dollars, but to ensure the agency is ready to *improve* its programs to meet the needs of its members, volunteers, and communities for years to come.

We look forward to hearing how AmeriCorps plans to continue to correct the challenges identified by the Inspector General, all while tackling its mission of improving lives, strengthening communities, and fostering civic engagement.

I want to thank Ms. Jeffery and Mr. Smith for your work and the opportunity to discuss how we can best leverage AmeriCorps to serve our nation.