

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
House Committee on Education and the Workforce
“Fraud, Mismanagement, Non-Compliance, and Safety: The History of Failures of the Corporation for National and Community Service”
Full Committee Hearing
Tuesday, April 17, 2018 | 10:00 am

Good morning and thank you Chairwoman Foxx. And thank you Ms. Stewart for taking the time to testify before the Committee about the important work of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the return on investment of our nation’s strong commitment to service.

Last year, 325,000 Americans serving through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps invested 155 million hours of service to their communities at more than 50,000 locations across the nation. In my district alone, \$100 million in funding from CNCS and matching contributions supported 396 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members support programs. These programs include the Virginia Peninsula Boys & Girls Club, which inspires and enables all youth to realize their full potential. Four of these clubs are strategically located in public housing developments and are instrumental in providing support and enrichment activities for residents.

Service programs also engage and support retired Americans. The City of Hampton, in my District, sponsors a Foster Grandparents program in which 113 “foster grandparents” mentor and counsel at-risk children, including over 150 children in Head Start and over 250 in elementary school. Ninety-two percent of Head Start children with foster grandparents showed improvements in phonological awareness, book knowledge, print awareness, and early literacy skills.

The Senior Companion program engages over 50 senior volunteers throughout my district to help more than 150 homebound and disabled seniors maintain an independent lifestyle in their homes.

Not only do service programs provide vital services for those in need from infancy through old age, but they also produce societal benefits that far exceed costs. For example, seventy-nine percent of AmeriCorps alumni say their service was a defining professional experience. Fifty-nine percent of hiring managers believe that AmeriCorps alumni have the soft skills difficult to find in traditional applicants for job openings. In fact, more than 450 companies, including Disney, CSX, and Comcast, are prioritizing national service alumni in their hiring.

These results are proof that national and community service programs go beyond their altruistic roots and contribute to high-quality workforce development opportunities that may rival the best apprenticeship programs. Elimination of national service programs and CNCS would be disservice to the small and large businesses looking for skilled employees.

National and community service programs not only benefit states, localities, nonprofits, and businesses, but also the Corps members themselves. A 2009 empirical study published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* found that AmeriCorps participation increased its member’s civic engagement, connection to communities other than their own, and knowledge about problems facing the community. For older participants who aren’t at the beginning of their

careers, the report cites gains in health, self-esteem, life satisfaction, financial help, and civic capital/resources. All of these benefits I mentioned are reasons why the cost-benefit ratio of AmeriCorps is up to more than \$2.50 return in public benefit for every dollar invested.

Sadly, this morning's hearing is not on the benefits of national and community service. Nor is this hearing to discuss a thoughtful and bipartisan reauthorization of service programs. We are not called here today to discuss how the new CEO is working to improve CNCS operations and technical assistance.

Instead, this hearing was called by the Majority to further a false narrative that CNCS exists to waste taxpayer dollars by doling out generous grants to unaccountable nonprofit organizations that are plagued with a history of waste, fraud, and abuse. In reality, CNCS grants go to under-resourced, community-driven organizations and amount to roughly \$6.50 per each hour a corps member works. Despite the claims of the Majority, there is no evidence of improper direct grant payments made by CNCS. Additionally, the Corporation's swift effort to implement the OIG's recommendations has increased grantee-to-sub grantee payment compliance by nearly 50 percent in just one year.

I remind everyone that this hearing comes on the heels of President Trump's FY19 budget request to eliminate CNCS and one year after the President's FY18 budget request that also proposed to zero out CNCS. Last year, the Higher Education and Workforce Training Subcommittee held a hearing with a nearly identical title during which the same egregious claims were made by the majority.

At that time, my colleague Representative Susan Davis submitted for the record a letter signed by 65 current and former Republican officials expressing strong support for funding CNCS. That list includes Republicans like former Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, former Congressman Chris Gibson, and Ron Kaufman, who served as President George H. W. Bush's political director. The letter remains just as relevant one year later, and I ask unanimous consent to enter it into this morning's hearing record. And in another showing of strong bipartisan support for the invaluable work of the Corporation, this Congress increased CNCS funding by \$34 million in the recently-enacted bipartisan Omnibus appropriations bill.

Service programs were last reauthorized in 2009 by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The bill was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and showed the value America places on service programs. I look forward to the time when this committee can objectively assess what is working and what needs improvement – the same way it did in 2009. That way, we can put forward a thoughtful reauthorization that strengthens, not eliminates, national and community service programs.

Thank you again Ms. Stewart for testifying today. I look forward to hearing more about your efforts to strengthen CNCS and the broader benefits of national and community service.

I yield back.