

Congressman David Price

Testimony regarding National Service to the Labor HHS Subcommittee

- Good afternoon Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and the distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Today I am speaking on behalf of the National Service Caucus, a bipartisan group of nearly 80 Members. My colleague and fellow caucus co-chair, Rep. Doris Matsui, sends her regrets for not being able to testify with me.
- I will begin my remarks with a brief history and summary of National Service. National volunteer programs that established the fundamentals for National Service began as early as the 1960s under President John F. Kennedy, who was eager to establish a domestic service program similar to the Peace Corps before the premature ending of his tenure. President Lyndon Johnson adhered to the wishes of our late president by establishing volunteer programs designed to engage older Americans and engage young volunteers by establishing the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program.
- VISTA quickly expanded and codified by Congress in the early 1970s with the bipartisan Domestic Volunteer Service Act, outlining the specific mission and goals of National Service in relation to our country. A mere two decades later, the Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS, was established, creating the larger programs that we are familiar with today: AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and what was formerly known as Serve America.
- It was conservative author William F. Buckley Jr. that wrote in his book “Gratitude: Reflections on What We Owe to Our Country” that “participation in the community should take more active form than merely paying taxes, buying and selling in the marketplace, and voting.” Buckley consistently advocated a strong case for national civic service, recognizing the proven capacity of the government to mobilize young people through

educational opportunities to serve the most vulnerable populations in our country.

- National Service quickly became center to our national discourse after the tragedies that ensued on September 11, 2001. At the 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush called on Americans to devote two years, or 4,000 hours, to volunteer service during their lifetimes.
- Today, CNCS is guided by the principles of putting the needs of local communities first, strengthening public-private partnerships, assisting with the accessibility of grant funding to rural and economically distressed communities, among other strong mission principles.
- Many of you are familiar with the benefits and successes of AmeriCorps, a program established to provide opportunities for motivated and dedicated Americans to civically engage in state and local projects. Each year, over 80,000 Americans immerse themselves in these programs that address community needs or respond to disasters.
- Senior Corps, largely developed under President Richard Nixon, has connected our nation's older generations with people and organizations in need across the country. Senior Corps members become coaches and mentors, contributing their career skills and expertise to grow communities. One of the largest programs is the Foster Grandparents program, which enriches the lives of young people with volunteers age 55 and over by serving local organizations committed to the betterment of children.
- Last, the Social Innovation Fund, or SIF, catalyzes and mobilizes public and private funds to transform the impact that local nonprofits have on communities. As of March 2016, SIF leveraged \$295 million of federal investment to reach commitments of more than twice the value. The vital goal of SIF is simply to determine what works to alleviate community-specific problems and sustaining those practices to benefit more people.

- National Service works by engaging young people, providing services to military families and helping communities succeed. Through service, highly motivated young Americans can participate in career-related service opportunities such as servicing with the Community Health Corps, increasing their earning potential. Additionally, a generation held back by increasing student debt can now seek alternatives to paying for their education.
- The unique nature of National Service stems from its ability to leverage a small public investment to receive substantial private investments, allowing the maintenance of economic sustainability for projects and missions. Additionally, grants are state and local-centric, allowing for the specific knowledge of communities to dictate efficient and effective distribution to areas in need. Rural and urban areas alike receive grants tailored to the needs of the communities.
- In my district, we host over 350 AmeriCorps volunteers and 162 Senior Corps volunteers, serving with several universities in my district, local housing authorities, and local educational nonprofits, to name a few. Those that serve have a lasting impact on my district and the state, allowing for communities to sustain and flourish for future generations.
- National Service is not just a “bleeding heart” policy, but rather a core belief of our country with bipartisan roots. This agency propels a new generation a new generation of young people to have a place to make a difference in their country.
- Again, thank you for this opportunity to advocate on behalf of this essential national agency and I encourage the subcommittee to diligently review the nationwide effects of National Service.