

**Testimony of Lynnetta Kopp (President, National Senior Corps Association)**

House Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss funding for the three Senior Corps programs, which are administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Those programs being: The Foster Grandparent Program, Senior Companion Program, and RSVP.

The funding levels we request are as follows:

Foster Grandparent Program: \$107,702,000

RSVP: \$63,000,000

Senior Companion Program: \$ 45,512.000.00

My name is Lynnetta Kopp and I testify today as President of the National Senior Corps Association, representing the interests of Senior Corps directors, volunteers, and the people and communities we serve. (I also bring regards from my colleagues in the leadership of the National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors and the National Association of RSVP Directors, whose organizations also embrace this request.)

Senior Corps is a federally authorized and funded network of national service programs that provide older Americans an opportunity to share their life experiences through volunteer service.

The Foster Grandparent Program, RSVP, and the Senior Companion Program, are the mechanism through which individuals age 55 and better provide essential services to cost-effectively address un-met critical community needs.

I have had the pleasure of being involved with Senior Corps since 2004 as Executive Director of two Senior Corps program in La Crosse, Wisconsin-RSVP and the Foster Grandparent Program. I come before you today advocating for funding for the continuance of the three Senior Corps programs.

The requested funding will restore the level of support afforded these critical senior volunteer programs to historical levels – still short of the goal of providing every senior who wishes to serve, that opportunity. These levels would reverse the 20% cut to RSVP which led to the loss of 100,000 volunteer positions for seniors seeking to make a positive impact in their communities, through service, and would provide sufficient funding to sustain the Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program at their current levels.

*The National Senior Corps is the story of many, one of which I share with you now.*

*La Crosse, WI...January, 20 below zero., No telephone, no heat, not even a stove, and now a broken water faucet. This senior woman, lived alone...very low income and not sure where to turn for help. Having exhausted all her resources, someone suggested she call RSVP as they had a volunteer Handyman program that may be able to assist. RSVP volunteers answered the call. It was essential for her faucet to be replaced so that she could have running water in her home. The handymen were able to not only repair and replace the faucet, they shared with her more about the services and programs RSVP has. This individual was so moved by the assistance she received and the compassion shown her that she wanted to give back in some way which led her to become an RSVP volunteer tutoring and mentoring students in need of extra help with reading and math skills. This is just a small sample of the myriad ways in which Senior Corps makes a difference in so many lives.*

The new administration will be presenting a fiscal year 2018 budget shortly which **may** eliminate funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service and its programs, including Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and many other worthy opportunities for Americans to serve.

If this is true, the direction is the wrong one. To “coin” a phrase, this move would be “penny wise and pound foolish”.

Not only have these programs enjoyed broad bipartisan support from members of Congress, including those of you who serve on this Subcommittee, the programs of the Senior Corps are incredibly cost effective. In fact, for every \$1.00 spent on volunteer service by our nation's seniors, communities reap a nearly ten-fold return in the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Programs and even more than that amount in the return on investment in RSVP, given the low cost-per-volunteer of the program.

The two stipend programs of the Senior Corps (Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program) provide seniors who are low income and many who are at or below 200 percent of the poverty line an opportunity to serve their neighbors and in the case of Foster Grandparents serve at risk and disadvantaged youth, and homebound and frail seniors through the Senior Companion Program. In return for their service, the income-qualified volunteers receive a modest stipend.

There isn't a day that goes by without our Senior Corps directors receiving testimonials of the value of the service provided:

*"If not for my Senior Companion Program volunteer, I don't know what I would have done. She's been a life saver. I couldn't have gotten food or meds and probably would have died of loneliness. I have absolutely no help or other family. I'm sure I would have no life without this program. I've very grateful for it and don't even like to think what it would be like without it."*

RSVP provides opportunities for individuals age 55 and better to make a difference in their communities through volunteer service, offering maximum flexibility and choice to its volunteers by matching the personal interests and skills of volunteers with opportunities to fill un-met needs in our communities.

It has been proven time and time again that RSVP volunteers assist in improving the lives of their neighbors and friends every day by meeting the un-met needs of their communities.

Whether it is helping prepare their tax returns, provide needed transportation services, offer respite to caregivers, deliver health and nutrition services, support veterans and military families, volunteer in parks, participate in disaster prevention and relief activities, just to name a few.

We work collaboratively through such networks as Area Agencies on Aging, city and county governments, social service agencies, and faith-based organizations.

RSVP volunteers served 329,000 veterans through transportation and employment service referrals; mentored more than 78,000 children; provided independent living services to 797,000 adults, primarily frail seniors; provided respite services to nearly 20,300 family or informal caregivers; engaged 20,100 veterans who served as RSVP volunteers and leveraged an additional 18,500 volunteers to support RSVP activities such as delivering meals to those in need and tutoring at-risk children. RSVP also serves as an important resource in disaster relief efforts.

All told, the roughly \$200,000,000 which funds the Senior Corps provides a \$2.3 billion dollar return on investment, worth well in excess of this investment. According to data compiled by Independent Sector, the more than 25,000 Foster Grandparents supported by this request would contribute 24,000,000 hours of service valued at \$565,440,000. By restoring funding as requested for RSVP, thousands of RSVP volunteers would enhance the 62,000,000 hours of service, valued at \$1,460,720,000 based on the Independent Sector's data (which values an hour of volunteer service at \$23.56) and the more than 12,000 Senior Companions underwritten by this budget proposal would provide 12.2 million hours of service valued at \$287,432,000, helping roughly 61,000 older frail seniors in our communities.

The Senior Corps has over 45 years of successful performance measurement and has provided cost-effective services to Americans who need attention or a helping hand saving this nation millions of dollars. For decades, the Senior Corps has been the cornerstone of National Service and civic engagement. During difficult budget times, senior volunteers are a stabilizing force in communities across our nation by providing the most cost-effective service for those un-met community needs.

While great value is derived by the beneficiaries of senior service, the benefit to those who serve is also tangible and quite measurable. By keeping seniors active and involved, the Senior Corps keeps older Americans vibrant and in their communities, avoiding the cost of institutionalization, keeping bright the social connections that our nation's seniors must maintain to remain vital, and truly defining "community" in a country too frequently measured by our differences these days than by our commonality.

Those who serve are proud to serve and those they serve are grateful.

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Subcommittee, the commitment you have continuously provided for our programs is indeed appreciated. I am here today on behalf of the thousands of volunteers, organizations and agencies who rely on Senior Corps, asking you to continue your support and join us in championing our budget request for these vital programs.

On a more personal note, thank you for your public service and remember, one does not have to be retired to be a volunteer in Senior Corps.

Thank you for this opportunity. I am prepared to answer any questions you might have.