



# OPENING STATEMENT

**House Committee on Education and Labor**

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

## **Opening Statement of Chairman Scott (VA-03)**

*Full Committee Hearing*

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

*Zoom*

Wednesday, December 1, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

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We are meeting to reflect on the important role of the Corporation for National and Community Service – better known as AmeriCorps – in supporting communities through service opportunities.

The hearing today also meets our oversight responsibility, according to House Rules, to examine AmeriCorps' disclaimed financial audit for Fiscal Year 2021. Whenever an agency receives such a report the Committee of jurisdiction is required to hold an oversight hearing such as the one we are holding today.

We are joined by and we welcome AmeriCorps' Inspector General, Deborah Jeffery, and the Acting CEO, Malcom Coles, to discuss how AmeriCorps can best fulfill its vital mission.

Since AmeriCorps' was founded in 1993, it has empowered 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 has been 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 to coordinate COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

In just the last year, members in my district have helped seniors live independently and helped our youth develop literacy skills. And since its founding, over 1,900 members from my district have been mobilized, serving more than 3 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 both our communities and our workforce. 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 is facing serious challenges that must be addressed for this agency to reach its full potential.

As we'll hear today from our witnesses, AmeriCorps has failed to implement a rigorous financial management program since 2017, which has left the agency without the tools to adequately manage grantees and discover and crackdown on bad actors. The Inspector General's findings are a clear call for the agency to overhaul its accounting and grantee oversight processes. I look forward to hearing today more about how AmeriCorps' plans to address these issues.

Modernizing and strengthening AmeriCorps' financial infrastructure is critical to ensuring the agency is carrying out its mission and delivering on behalf of its members, communities, and taxpayers.

This is all the more important in light of the historic funding increase for AmeriCorps that Congress is considering as part of the *Build Back Better Act*. This investment does include funding what AmeriCorps needs to address the management changes identified by the Inspector General.

The investments we make in AmeriCorps deliver tangible returns for taxpayers. We have found that every \$1 that Congress invests in AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs more than \$17 is returned to communities, service members and the federal government.

We look forward to hearing how AmeriCorps plans to work with our Committee to ensure that these investments are paired with robust improvements to address the agency's ongoing management challenges and strong, continuing oversight. At a time of a deep division across the country, the AmeriCorps' mission of bringing Americans together to serve communities is more important than ever.

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

I now yield to the distinguished Ranking Member from North Carolina, Dr. Foxx, for the purpose of an opening statement.