

**CONGRESSWOMAN BETTY MCCOLLUM TESTIMONY**  
**LHHS Member Hearing, CNCS Concerns**  
**Room 2358-C, Rayburn House Office Building**  
**March 27, 2019; 10:00 AM**  
**Length: 4-5 minutes**

Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole, thank you for allowing me to testify today and thank you both for your continuous support for National Service.

I am very proud of the fact that my state of Minnesota is a national leader in volunteerism and national service. The St. Paul/Minneapolis metro area is ranked number one in the nation for volunteering and Minnesota is ranked second among states for number of citizen volunteer hours.

I am here today to ask this subcommittee to once again fully fund the Corporation for National and Community Service – and the programs it operates such as AmeriCorps, VISTA, Senior Corps RSVP, Companion Corps, and Foster Grandparents, along with state service commissions.

The administration’s FY20 budget request calls for the elimination of the Corporation for National and Community Service, more commonly referred to as CNCS. The administration states that it wants to shift the “responsibility to fund national service and volunteerism to the private and nonprofit sectors.”

Madam Chair, as you are aware of, and as this subcommittee has proven time and again, there is broad bipartisan and bicameral support for CNCS and the President’s request is unacceptable.

While I am very disappointed by the President's budget request, I am deeply concerned by the manner in which CNCS has been recently operating— one that I believe is ignoring Congressional intent.

In June 2018, Barbara Stewart, the CEO of CNCS, announced a "Transformation and Sustainability Plan" for the Corporation.

In September 2018, the Labor-HHS appropriations bill was signed into law and CNCS was funded for FY19 at \$1.083 billion despite the President's request to zero out funding.

In December 2018, CNCS announced its plans to close all 46 state and territorial offices in favor of regional offices as part of the "Transformation" plan.

Within days, I heard from outraged Minnesotan non-profits who partner with CNCS volunteers to fight poverty, strengthen community services, and respond to local emergencies.

These stakeholders are losing their local CNCS office, but more importantly, they are losing the deep-seated relationships that they have forged with CNCS staff.

To quote a letter sent to me by 250 Minnesota VISTA members strongly opposing this regionalization plan, "A local state office of CNCS, with staff living and working in the communities they support, is essential to the success of VISTA to drive local community solutions to pressing challenges in education, the opioid crisis, public health, veteran services and more."

Our Minnesota office closes May 1<sup>st</sup>.

Local CNCS staff will be forced to work out of their homes and then re-apply for a position in the Kansas City regional office 500 miles away. The essential volunteer infrastructure that my home state of Minnesota has spent decades to build will be completely uprooted.

Other state offices have already been closed without Congressional consultation.

Last month, I sent a letter to Ms. Stewart requesting information about how much taxpayer money will be spent paying off leases for empty state CNCS offices that have either already been closed or are about to be. This amount will likely be in the millions. I have yet to receive a response.

The leadership at CNCS is operating unilaterally with little accountability to Congress, local stakeholders, or taxpayers. I do not know if their true intent is sustainability or outright elimination of CNCS.

I urge the subcommittee to include language that prohibits the “Transformation” plan from proceeding and restores the 46 state offices until Congress and local stakeholders are consulted and included in a formal process to discuss the future of CNCS.

Madam Chair, as you know, I am not the only one concerned with this plan. 35 of our colleagues joined a letter I sent to Ms. Stewart asking for this plan to be halted. You have sent similar letters as well.

Last week, CNCS Inspector General, Deborah Jeffries, voiced that her office shared these strong concerns about the “Transformation and Sustainability Plan” and I would like to insert a copy of her report for the record.

To quote the Inspector General:

- *“Aspects of this plan present heightened risks of fraud, waste and mismanagement that warrant particularly close oversight.”*

Colleagues, the CNCS-Inspector General is ringing the alarm bell.

We are not here as appropriators to knowingly, willfully throw taxpayer money away on an unnecessary, risky scheme like this Transformation plan.

I believe in the mission of national service and the contributions CNCS makes to communities, families and individuals in my state and around the country.

Congress should fully fund CNCS, but we must also put a stop to this reorganization scheme by exercising our authority and responsibility to protect taxpayer funds.

It is my hope that this generation of Americans and the next will have the opportunity to serve their country and their neighbors in need.

This builds a sense of family, community, and country and is part of what it means to be an American citizen.

I thank you for allowing me to testify.