



June 29, 2020

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer:

We write to support bold action—modeled on great moments in our history—to address the economic, public health, and social crisis in which we find ourselves. Over the past several months, people across the country have experienced monumental disruptions as a result of the spread of COVID-19. Congress and the Administration have negotiated four laws in response to the emerging crisis as crucial early steps.¹ As we consider another COVID-19 response package, we urge you to include language consistent with the objectives of the bipartisan *Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act* and funding sufficient to implement it. Including this vital support for national service programs will provide economic opportunity and work experience for those who serve while bolstering our efforts to restore the cadence of American life.

The United States has a proud history of responding to crises through broad calls to work and service. More than 80 years ago, we rose to the challenge of the Great Depression with the creation of programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).² Millions of participants benefitted from paid employment and opportunities to develop their skills while constructing infrastructure and producing cultural works we still enjoy today.³

¹ See Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-123, 134 Stat. 146; Families First Coronavirus Response Act, Pub. L. No. 116-127, 134 Stat. 178 (2020); Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136, 134 Stat. 281 (2020); Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act, Pub. L. No. 116-139, 134 Stat. 620 (2020).

² See Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941* 154, 265 (3d ed. 2009).

³ See, e.g., *Smyrna School District*, NAT'L ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS, <https://www.arts.gov/article/smyrna-school-district-smyrna-de> (last visited Apr. 5, 2020); Dante Brizill, *A Depression-era Work Program Helped Build Modern Del.*, NEWS JOURNAL (Aug. 13, 2019, 6:00 AM), <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/readers/2019/08/13/depression-era-work-program-helped-build-modern-delaware-opinion/1991678001/>.

Today's alarming news demands similarly bold action. As the immediate human toll of the outbreak mounts, so too does the economic challenge ahead. At one point, 316 million Americans were being asked to stay at home,⁴ and communities across the country continue to grapple with challenging choices about when and how to reopen.⁵ Since mid-March, one in every five American workers has filed for unemployment insurance.⁶ Students about to graduate from college are facing limited job opportunities.⁷ Business leaders and economists are discussing the depth and duration of the likely recession.⁸ As the CCC and WPA once did, the expansion of service programs envisioned in the *CORPS Act* would serve dual purposes, benefiting both participants and the nation as a whole.

First, the proposal would support new national service positions—for a total of 150,000 AmeriCorps positions in the first year, 200,000 in the second, and 250,000 in the third—that would provide economic and educational opportunity to Americans who today face a challenging job market. These positions would provide participants an allowance that covers reasonable living expenses for the duration of their service. Such roles would also come with an improved education award, easing some participants' student loan burdens while providing others a path to further training going forward. These improved benefits would ensure that financial considerations do not pose a barrier to service. During their terms of service, participants would also gain valuable skills and work experience that they would bring to their future employment.

Second, participants' service would be a vital component of our efforts to respond to and recover from the havoc that the novel coronavirus outbreak has wrought. Programs would prioritize services that are critical during the pandemic and its aftermath, including those that support students who have been out of school, promote public health, expand programs for those experiencing food insecurity, and ensure our parks can offer safe recreational opportunity. In the wake of the social disruption that our efforts at mitigating COVID-19 entail, service programs

⁴ Sarah Mervosh, Denise Lu, and Vanessa Swales, *See Which States and Cities Have Told Residents to Stay at Home*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 20, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-stay-at-home-order.html>.

⁵ See Sarah Mervosh, Jasmine C. Lee, Lazaro Gamio and Nadja Popovich, *See How All 50 States Are Reopening*, N.Y. TIMES (June 1, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/states-reopen-map-coronavirus.html>

⁶ Anneken Tappe, *1 in 5 American Workers Has Filed for Unemployment Benefits Since Mid-March*, CNN BUSINESS (May 7, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/07/economy/unemployment-benefits-coronavirus/index.html>.

⁷ See David Yaffe-Bellany and Jaclyn Peiser, *For the Class of 2020, a Job-Eating Virus Recalls the Great Recession*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 27, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/business/coronavirus-class-of-2020-jobs.html>.

⁸ See Peter S. Goodman, *Why the Global Recession Could Last a Long Time*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/business/economy/coronavirus-recession.html>; Zachary Warmbrodt, *Dimon Sees 'Bad Recession' After 'Bad Planning' for Pandemic*, POLITICO (Apr. 6, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/06/jamie-dimon-recession-pandemic-167871>.

promise not only to provide crucial services, but also to reinvigorate our civic and community life.⁹

The *CORPS Act* also proposes critical tools and resources to invite participation by a diverse range of Americans, support community service by those who cannot commit to a full term in an AmeriCorps program, and facilitate the important work of Senior Corps members while social distancing requirements remain in place.

Much as the country did 80 years ago, we face a difficult chapter ahead. Empowering more Americans to participate in robust national service programs over the next three years would enhance our recovery from this economic and social emergency. We urge you to support the inclusion of the language consistent with the objectives of the *CORPS Act* and the funding required for its implementation in the next response package.

Sincerely,



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Tom Udall

Tom Udall
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

⁹ See NAT'L COMM'N ON MILITARY, NAT'L, AND PUBLIC SERVICE, *INSPIRED TO SERVE 44* (2020)



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



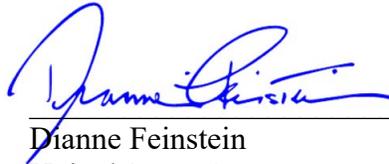
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Martin Heinrich
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Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Patrick Leahy