



**America's Service Commissions and Service Year Alliance
Statement for the Record**

**Bicameral public Senate Climate Change Task Force discussion on
Civilian Climate Corps proposals**

Wednesday, June 23, 2021

Members of the Task Force,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record.

In the American Jobs Plan, President Biden proposed a Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) in the spirit of the original Civilian Conservation Corps to: “Mobilize the next generation of conservation and resilience workers. This \$10 billion investment will put a new, diverse generation of Americans to work conserving our public lands and waters, bolstering community resilience, and advancing environmental justice through a new Civilian Climate Corps, all while placing good-paying union jobs within reach for more Americans.”

National service has a long and storied role in conservation and climate work. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps put millions of young men to work on conservation and infrastructure projects across the country. Many saved money to send their families and contributed to the growth of the local economies in the places they served. Since then, conservation corps and other national service programs focused on climate, disaster and resilience have grown across the country with young people serving in rural, urban, and tribal communities as part of AmeriCorps.

Through a developed network of federal agencies, Governor-appointed state service commissions, and hundreds of local nonprofit partners, thousands of “corpsmembers” are engaged each year already in projects that have laid the groundwork to scale up and address the climate crisis:

- Preserving public lands and waters, preventing and protecting biodiversity, increasing reforestation, building restoring watersheds, and expanding access to recreation — improving 330,000 acres of public lands each year.

- Reducing carbon emissions and saving energy costs by weatherizing homes and public buildings, performing energy audits, and installing solar panels and other renewable energy systems.
- Supporting urban areas by creating and maintaining city parks and greenspaces, improving stormwater management, recycling, and maintaining urban farms.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with food systems through community gardens, farm to table initiatives, reducing food waste, and nutrition education.
- Helping communities prepare, respond, and recover from natural disasters and other climate-change effects.

Unlike the original CCC, the existing national service system also reflects the diversity of America. AmeriCorps members are as racially and ethnically diverse as the general population, and include men and women of all ages and backgrounds including low-income and minority young adults, Native Americans, and veterans.

National service is also targeted specifically at meeting unmet community needs and building community capacity. It can help give voice to the needs of communities in the development of a resilient 21st century economy and infrastructure. Many programs also include workforce development as a key component of their service and can be used as models for putting corpsmembers on pathways to growing careers.

National service programs and their public-private partnerships with community-based organizations have decades of experience in environmental stewardship, conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects along with disaster response and resiliency. The current ecosystem of climate and conservation programs are a foundation upon which the CCC can build, scale, and innovate to develop capacity and new approaches to today's climate challenges. National service is a tool that can engage hundreds of thousands of Americans in addressing climate change, while serving their country, and building skills necessary for high-demand climate jobs.

We are ready to build the CCC from a place of strength, incorporate new benefits to meet the challenges our nation is facing, and engage a diverse group of rural and urban youth all while maintaining a locally driven approach that is responsive to local needs and provides pathways to growing, and good paying, careers.

CCC Principles & Policy Recommendations

Principle 1: Develop a Unique Identity for the CCC and Maintain an Ethos of Service to Country

The CCC should have a unique identity within the federal government that includes uniform branding, mission, and purpose even if multiple federal, state, and local organizations are involved in administration. This will help to outwardly brand and identify the CCC as a unique entity meant to address a specific purpose through service to the country, and simplify implementation nationally, even with state and community input on development and projects.

The CCC should be promoted as a separate national service program of the federal, state and local partners, but should have stand-alone grant applications as well as recruitment efforts. It will be important to instill an ethos of service to country throughout the CCC and foster a sense of shared mission and purpose to unite members as well.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Establish procedures to develop unique branding, logo, mission etc. that promotes national service and a shared ethos of service to country
2. Establish a promotional and recruitment program
3. Ensure simplified grant applications and interfaces for the public and local organizations

Principle 2: Ensure Corpsmembers are Paid a Living Wage, Develop In-Demand Work Skills on a Path to a Career, and Gain Education Benefits

A position with the CCC must ensure corpsmembers are provided a living wage and don't have to rely on other public benefits to survive, or close off the opportunity to serve in the CCC to those without wealthy families.

To do so, we must ensure the CCC includes the following policy changes:

1. Ensures a living wage is provided by increasing the overall AmeriCorps living allowance to account for a living wage
2. Increases the value of the AmeriCorps Segal Education Award
3. Provides workforce development funding from Department of Labor including for trainings, pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship curriculum, and industry-recognized certifications
4. Provides on-ramps to career pathways and apprenticeships
5. Purposefully builds partnerships with industry partners, unions, community colleges, universities and other postsecondary education programs
6. Adjusts the overall AmeriCorps Cost per Member-Service-Year (MSY)
7. Removes AmeriCorps barriers to job training hours while in-service
8. Provides adequate support services like healthcare and childcare

9. Provides non-competitive hiring authority for all corpsmembers with federal partners (currently only applicable to AmeriCorps VISTA and Public Lands Corps members)

Principle 3: Ensure a Diverse Group of Local Corpsmembers, Community Organizations, and Staff

The CCC should prioritize enrolling diverse corpsmembers that are representative of their communities, which also extends to the organizations engaged in implementing the CCC locally, along with their staff. Underserved rural and urban areas should be prioritized along with communities that have suffered historic environmental inequities, while veterans and out-of-work youth who may benefit from career paths into resource management, renewable energy, and construction should be engaged.

The opportunity to serve in the CCC should also extend to high-school aged youth for summer terms of service as envisioned through the existing authorization for an American Conservation and Youth Service Corps in addition to enabling DACA recipients to serve.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Prioritize diverse corpsmembers, organizations, and staff
2. Target underserved rural, urban, and tribal communities and communities with historic environmental inequities
3. Purposefully engage veterans and out-of-school or out-of-work youth to develop career paths into resource management, renewable energy, and construction
4. Extend the opportunity to serve in AmeriCorps summer programs to high-school aged youth
5. Enable DACA recipients, DED and TPS holders, refugees and asylees to participate in AmeriCorps

Principle 4: Prioritize Local Communities and Build Community

Too often local communities and states are overlooked by the federal government in addressing the most unique and pressing needs, and communities feel like they don't have input into the decision-making process. The structure of the CCC must bring in community and state engagement and have a process by which local organizations are selected based on their expertise working within targeted communities and projects.

The CCC must also ensure corpsmembers feel a sense of ownership of the projects and investment in their community and that the community is investing in them. To do so, the CCC should enable capacity building at non-profit and municipal organizations and within the community. Cultural competency will also be important for organizations and corpsmembers along with understanding the historic perspective of communities around climate and environmental issues.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Select local organizations to participate based on expertise working with targeted communities and projects

2. Enable capacity building and community planning projects for corpsmembers at local organizations and governments
3. Promote culturally competent and historically accurate trainings

Principle 5: Target Projects to Address Local and State Needs and Historic Inequities

Given the scope of the problems and geographic footprint of the country, the CCC must prioritize projects that are informed by local and state input and address pressing climate and natural disaster-related problems locally, along with righting historic inequities that have contributed to environmental and health degradation.

The types of projects undertaken may include: carbon sequestration, green infrastructure, water infrastructure, energy efficiency, renewable energy, building retrofits, disaster mitigation and resiliency, community planning and capacity building, local food systems, conserving lands and waters, tree planting, wildfire remediation, and advancing environmental justice.

Addressing a wide range, albeit targeted, types of projects must also include a waiver of federal project and AmeriCorps match requirements for local organizations and governments and allowing for certain projects to take place on private lands so long as there is a clearly demonstrable public benefit like a mutually agreed upon watershed restoration on a rancher's land or planting native trees for example. Federal partners, and regional offices, must also be aware of each other and the role of CNCS via interagency agreements in implementing the CCC.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Require a process for awarding funds that are informed by local and state input and address pressing climate and natural disaster-related problems locally, along with righting historic inequities that have contributed to environmental and health degradation
2. Waive federal project and AmeriCorps match requirements
3. Enable projects on private lands with demonstrable public benefit

Principle 6: Build on the Existing Federal, State, Local National Service System

The existing national service system has evolved over many years from the original Civilian Conservation Corps to be the primary vehicle for engaging the next generation of conservation and resiliency leaders. With this history of environmental stewardship driven by a community and state-based approach, and an existing group of federal, state, and local partnerships, existing CNCS programs are well positioned, with some enhancements, to support the infrastructure needed to develop a CCC quickly with strong oversight of taxpayer funds.

The infrastructure for enrolling corpsmembers should primarily be the programs (like AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA, and NCCC) and existing and new community-based grantees of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and could also include existing authorities like the Public Lands Corps, or as a trainee in a workforce

development program. This would ensure CCC corpsmembers can benefit from the living allowance, education award, loan forbearance, healthcare, hiring preference, and support services offered through CNCS' existing national service programs.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Enroll corpsmembers through the existing AmeriCorps and VISTA programs and the Public Lands Corps program where possible
2. Reference the other types of programs that may participate in the CCC (Public Lands Corps, workforce development classifications)

Principle 7: Utilize Existing Expertise at the Federal, State, and Local Level to Oversee the CCC

Conservation and environmental stewardship have evolved over the years into strong systems of partnerships at the federal, state, and local level. Federal and state land management, conservation, and infrastructure agencies along with national service and state service commissions have worked together to support local organizations in their work to engage the next generation of diverse conservation leaders.

A federal advisory committee should be developed to serve as the primary federal entity responsible for the management, reporting, and oversight of the CCC, along with awarding national financial agreements and distributing state-level formula funds.

The federal advisory committee should be comprised of the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Energy, Housing, Labor, Transportation as well as the EPA, FEMA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NOAA, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Additionally, the committee should include a number of representatives of state and local government, along with national conservation, service, and workforce development organizations, and youth representatives.

CNCS has the authority to enter into interagency agreements with the other federal agencies to enroll CCC members in national service positions and can then coordinate the awarding of financial awards to local organizations that combine CNCS and other federal project funding. Federal agencies would receive their own allocations of "project" funding that, combined with "human capital" funds of CNCS, would provide local organizations with a simplified financial award and uniform reporting.

There should be a separate CCC advisory committee appointed by the governors in each state that would bring together at minimum state service commissions, workforce development systems, and project-related departments (agriculture, conservation, natural resource, environmental, infrastructure departments for example) along with local conservation, service, and workforce development organizations, and youth representatives.

These entities together would identify appropriate projects, oversee effective implementation of the CCC initiative including uniform data collection, reporting, and oversight. They would ensure uniform grant applications and packages, identify appropriate levels and types of

projects for local organizations, build partnerships with employers, ensure workforce funding and curriculum etc. These entities would award grants that represent the “complete package” of funding to stand up a CCC program.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Establish a CCC Federal Advisory Committee with the aforementioned members and authorities
2. Establish CCC State Advisory Committees with the aforementioned members and authorities
3. Develop CNCS-led interagency agreements and federal “Memorandums of Understanding” on joint implementation of the CCC

Principle 8: Distribute CCC Funding through Federal, State, and Local Partnerships that Provide for Full Project Costs

State and local governments and organizations are closest to the types of projects needed locally while the federal government can help prioritize projects on federal lands and waters. The CCC must operate as a partnership between these entities to ensure the highest priority projects are undertaken, but maintain a simplified interface for entering into financial agreements with local entities.

Projects should also be funded with intent of reaching completion with the funding provided where possible. Too often project funding is scattered over multiple fiscal years and subject to fluctuations based on annual appropriations or the lack thereof.

The federal advisory committee would set priorities for federal projects and competitively select organizations to participate and receive funding. The federal advisory committee would receive funding to distribute on a national level and on federal lands and waters.

The state advisory commissions would set priorities for state and local projects and competitively select organizations to participate. The state commission would receive formula funding from the federal advisory committee to run their own competitive process for awarding funding to local organizations for state and local projects.

The President has proposed \$10 billion for the CCC which we envision spanning over 5 years. Existing accounts/appropriations avenues can be used for the following categories:

- Federal Project Accounts (DOI, USFS, NOAA, HUD, DOT, EPA etc.)
- State and Local Projects Accounts (Federal Programs/Accounts that pass-through funding to states)
- CNCS National Service Programs (AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA, NCCC)
- DOL Workforce Development Accounts (Dislocated Worker Demonstration, Youth and Adult Demonstration)

Policy Recommendations:

1. Determine the allocation of \$10 billion over 5 years between applicable federal partners and state and local funding

2. Empower the CCC Federal Advisory Committee to award grants and develop criteria for grantmaking
3. Empower the CCC State Advisory Committees to award grants, coordinate with the federal committee, and develop criteria for grantmaking
4. Develop a funding distribution plan and formula for funds for State and Local Projects to state committees