

January 24, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chairman Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and the Honorable members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

The Governor's Office for Children respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 033 - Department of Service and Civic Innovation - Maryland Corps Program Service Year Option Pathways - Revisions.

HB0033 expands the age range for the Young Adult Service Option Pathway Members to a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 24 years at the Program's start date. This expansion aligns with the mission of the Governor's Office for Children, which works to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families across Maryland by addressing poverty, improving support networks, and promoting economic mobility for those with the greatest needs. Amongst these groups is older youth, who face particular challenges as they navigate the transition to adulthood.

At the Governor's Office for Children, we recognize that young people ages 18 to 24 are in a critical period of personal and professional development. Access to meaningful service opportunities can shape their future trajectories. The Young Adult Service Option Pathway provides essential workforce experience, professional skill-building, and pathways to economic independence—factors that directly contribute to long-term stability and success.

Expanding the eligibility age to 24 ensures that more young adults, particularly those who may have delayed postsecondary education or career pathways due to financial, social, or systemic barriers, can engage in service, develop critical skills, and access post-service education and career benefits. This expansion aligns with the interagency approach that underlies the Governor's Office for Children's efforts to build a cohesive network of supports to ensure that children and families in Maryland can thrive. Older youth and young adults, particularly those from high-poverty neighborhoods, can fall between the cracks as they graduate high school, navigate access to the workforce and/or postsecondary education, and strive to become financially independent. The resources available to support these young people shift dramatically as they reach 18 years of age and beyond, leaving them without a sufficient safety net. The Governor's Office for Children therefore strongly supports creating more opportunities for this population, including expanding Service Year eligibility to include them.

Numerous data points illustrate the need for programming like The Young Adult Service Option Pathway in Maryland:

- **Poverty Rates:** In 2023, approximately 11.5 percent, or 143,785, of youth and young adults ages 18 to 34 years were living in poverty in Maryland. This group accounted for 25 percent of all individuals living in poverty at the time. (*American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates*)
- In 2023, the labor force participation rate for youth and young adults ages 16 to 19 years was 41 percent and 76.3 percent for those 20 to 24 years. Additionally, 14.5 percent of youth and young adults ages 16 to 19 years and 8.6 percent of youth and young adults ages 20 to 24 years, were unemployed, respectively. (*American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates*)
- In 2022, 57,000 youth aged 18 - 24 were neither in school nor working (Kids Count Report, AECF)

Additionally, broadening eligibility enhances The Young Adult Service Option Pathway's impact by creating a larger pipeline of diverse, service-minded young professionals who will contribute to their communities while preparing for long-term success. This expansion also supports Maryland's workforce and economic development goals by helping more young people secure career pathways that lead to sustained employment.

For these reasons, the Governor's Office for Children strongly supports HB 033 and urges a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carmel Martin

Special Secretary, Governor's Office for Children & Senior Advisor to the Governor, Economic Mobility