

March 18, 2025

The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk  
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 240, Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Ben Barnes  
Chair, Appropriations Committee  
Room 120, Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Chair Barnes, and Honorable Members of the Health and Government Operations and Appropriations Committees,

The Department of Service and Civic Innovation respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 248- Department of Service and Civic Innovation - Maryland Corps Program Service Year Option Pathways - Revisions. SB0248 is in the same form as HB0033, in which the Committees heard testimony on January 28, 2025.

SB0248 passed the Senate unanimously, 45-0. SB0248's crossfile, HB0033, passed the full HGO committee 16-5 and the full Appropriations committee unanimously. HB0033 also passed the third reader in the House 101-33.

This legislation represents a necessary step forward in ensuring the continued success, growth, and increased efficiency of the Maryland Corps and Service Year Option pathways, both of which provide invaluable opportunities for Marylanders to engage in service, gain workforce experience, and contribute to the state's communities.

SB0248 is the first departmental bill since the Department of Service and Civic Innovation (DSCI) creation in 2023. It reflects the lessons learned from recruiting and deploying our first two classes. The proposed changes address technical and operational improvements to enhance program efficiency, participant experience, and long-term sustainability. SB0248 does not have a fiscal note.

For reference, YA Pathway, Young Adult Service Year Option is the Service Year Option Pathway  
MSY Pathway, Maryland Service Year Option is the Maryland Corps Pathway

Key provisions of the bill include:

**Consolidation of the Program Fund:** SB0248 would merge the two line items (the Young Adult Service Year Option Fund and the Maryland Service Year Option Fund) into a single “Program Fund” that would allow the Department to avoid the need to request additional General Funds to account for the growth in the Service Year Option program while still supporting the Maryland Corps program. This creates operational flexibility and maximizes resource efficiency without increasing the state’s financial burden by consolidating the Service Year Option and Maryland Corps funding streams.

**Updated Salary Requirements:** SB0248 updated minimum wage requirements to the applicable county or State minimum wage, whichever is greater. Linking Member wages to the higher county or state minimum wage ensures fair compensation, keeping pace with cost-of-living variations across Maryland.

**Expanded Eligibility:** Expanding the age range for Service Year Option participants to a minimum of 18 years of age and a maximum of 24 years of age at the program's start date broadens access for disconnected youth. Disconnected youth are teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither working nor in school. These youth are also referred to as “opportunity youth” because reconnecting them to work and school has a positive economic and civic impact. In 2022, approximately 57,000 youth aged 18-24 in Maryland were not attending school, not working, and with no degree beyond high school. This will broaden the age eligibility to expand access to the Program based on the demand the Department has seen during the first two years.

In addition, SB0248 maintains the high school diploma requirement but removes the Maryland-specific graduation/diploma requirements. This will also allow new Maryland residents who may have graduated from high school in a different state to qualify for the program.

**Updated Residency Requirements:** SB0248 will require applicants of the Maryland Corps Pathway to be Maryland residents. Currently, Maryland Corps Pathway only gives preference to Maryland residents in the statute. Moving the preference to a requirement makes Maryland residency the same requirement for both Program pathways.

**Simplified Completion Award Distribution:** SB0248 removes the requirement that the Department provides the option of the \$6,000 completion award deposited into a tax-exempt Maryland 529 account. The Department is not able to award the \$6,000 completion award to be

deposited into a 529 account in a way that exempts the award from the Member's federal income tax liability.

The Department recognizes the value of the educational benefit the 529 program provides and has had Maryland 529 come to speak to Members on several occasions during Class One. Maryland 529 presented how to open an account, different portfolios, and how to add to contributions from their completion award or a future paycheck.

**Statutory Alignment with Current Operations:** This legislation eliminates outdated references, such as the inactive Executive Fellows Program, and formally integrates the Governor's Office of Service and Volunteerism into DSCI, reflecting current operations.

These adjustments are designed to make the Maryland Corps and Service Year Option more accessible, equitable, and sustainable. By streamlining operations and removing unnecessary barriers, SB0248 strengthens Maryland's workforce pipeline, supports economic mobility, and reinforces the state's commitment to civic engagement.

For these reasons, the Department of Service and Civic Innovation again urges a favorable report on SB0248. Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Secretary Paul Monterio and/or Meghan Music, Legislative Civic Innovation Specialist.

Yours in Service,

Paul Monteiro

Secretary, Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation