

HB 1016 - Higher Education - Maryland Corps Program Fund - Alterations
Testimony of Shirley Sagawa, Former CEO of Service Year Alliance
On February 27, 2020
Before the Appropriations Committee

A version of this testimony was [published](#) in the Washington Post in 2016 in support of expanding service years in Maryland.

As a Maryland resident, a former member of the Maryland Governor's Commission on Service and Volunteerism, and the former CEO of a national service organization, Service Year Alliance, I am proud to offer testimony in support of this bill.

This bill revamps Maryland Corps — which was originally signed into law in 2016 and would have, if funded, given 100 young adults in Maryland the chance to spend a year in community service before college, supported by a modest stipend and rewarded with money for college.

Today's bill brings Maryland Corps back to life and is the first step towards giving every young person in Maryland the opportunity to serve. This bill will initially allow the state legislature to study the power of service year to enhance Maryland's workforce — a critical workforce development tool that will benefit the next generation of young Marylanders.

Maryland has a long history of leading in service. Nearly 25 years ago, it became the first state with a service-learning requirement for high school graduation. Unfortunately, it remains the only state with such a requirement.

Around the same time, Barbara A. Mikulski (D), then a junior U.S. senator, helped enact a pilot national service program. This demonstration program became the model for AmeriCorps, enacted a few years later, and Mikulski, in her role as the Democratic leader of the subcommittee responsible for the program and, later, the full Appropriations Committee, made sure AmeriCorps was funded.

Thanks in no small part to Mikulski's efforts, Maryland has sustained service year programs for two decades that have provided much-needed help to the community while transforming the lives of the people who serve.

These programs include Civic Works, which puts 200 young adults annually into service year positions that enable them to learn job skills while meeting community needs. For example, Civic Works service year corps members have weatherized homes in Baltimore and built a "green," 200-square-foot "tiny house" that can exist off the grid; tutored students as part of the Advancement Via Individual Determination program and helped them prepare for college; and learned farming skills at Little Gunpowder Farm while growing high-quality vegetables at an affordable price.

Another long-standing program, Volunteer Maryland, places AmeriCorps members in nonprofit organizations, schools and government agencies so they can provide more services, improve the effectiveness of the organizations' volunteer programs and increase organizational capacity to manage volunteer programs.

In more rural parts of the state, A STAR! in Western Maryland assigns AmeriCorps members to tackle local issues within a four-county region — serving, for example, in Boys & Girls Clubs, cooperative extension, Goodwill and preschool programs.

Baltimore Corps, co-founded in 2013 by Wes Moore and Fagan Harris in partnership with the Aspen Institute Franklin Project, fields young leaders to address the city's biggest challenges. And the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, headquartered in Baltimore, places recent college graduates in high-poverty communities nationwide.

Service year programs have a tremendous impact on communities across the state, and this bill is a critical first step in expanding service year opportunities so that every young person in Maryland has an opportunity to serve their community while transforming their lives and putting them on a pathway to future educational and career opportunities. I am honored to offer my support of this bill and hope the state legislature will use this bill as an opportunity for Maryland to continue to lead the country in service.