



**HB850 – Higher Education – Maryland Corps Program Fund – COVID–19 Emergency  
Funding Priorities**

**Written Testimony of Jesse Colvin, CEO of Service Year Alliance**

**Submitted on March 5, 2021**

**Before the Appropriations Committee**

I'm Jesse Colvin, the CEO of Service Year Alliance, and I am proud to offer written testimony in support of HB850.

Service Year Alliance is a nonprofit whose mission is to make a year of paid, full-time service — a service year — a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans.

Americans and Marylanders are facing multiple historic crises simultaneously. COVID has killed more than 500,000 Americans and put millions out of work, disproportionately impacting young people and people of color.

These crises are converging at a time when polarization is plaguing our politics. Partisanship, distrust, and bias against those from different backgrounds have created deep rifts in our society and threaten our democracy.

For nearly 90 years, national service has played a critical role in our nation's recovery in times of crisis and has become an essential part of supporting local communities across the country.

We at Service Year Alliance fielded a national survey in January, and it found that 67% of respondents felt that it is important for the new presidential administration to prioritize programs that have the ability to heal divides in our country. In addition, it found that 63% agreed that national service programs are a good way to heal divides.

At Service Year Alliance, we are proud to lead the Serve America Together campaign, which is a campaign to make national service — including military, civilian, and public service — part of growing up in America. The campaign focuses on civilian national service specifically and defines civilian national service as paid, full-time national service opportunities with programs like AmeriCorps, YouthBuild, and Baltimore Corps among others.

The pandemic shaped a new landscape, one in which civilian national service was and is a critical element in addressing challenges at a local and state level with flexibility and resilience in the face of crisis. We've seen innovative partnerships amongst state leaders and national service stakeholders which allowed for a strong response in communities across the country.

Right now, national service corps members are on the front lines of the pandemic, carrying out critical activities such as contact tracing and supporting vaccine distribution. This bill would enable leaders in the state of Maryland to address the public health crisis while investing in an effective workforce development tool.

Service Year Alliance is a nationally-oriented organization supporting efforts across the country, and with this bill, Maryland would join a small group of states that are taking the bold step to look towards national service as a human capital solution that not only addresses our public health crisis but also transforms the lives of the young people who serve, improves communities where that service takes place, and catalyzes civic renewal in the aggregate.

We at Service Year Alliance look forward to continuing to support this bill and lifting Maryland up as an example that other leaders in other state houses across the country can follow.