

February 7, 2022

SB0228 — Maryland Corps Program – Revisions – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee;

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

The MOST Network strongly supports the proposed revisions to the Maryland Corps program. If implemented, these budgetary and recruiting measures would improve the program's effectiveness as a state-sponsored service organization, making invaluable contributions to the professional development of the program's participants and the communities they serve.

MOST has served as an AmeriCorps VISTA program since 2012 and has placed over 100 full term service members with non-profit organizations throughout the state. As such, our perspective of ideal operation structures and necessary adjustments comes from our own experience in expanding, strengthening, and redesigning this program for each succeeding year of CNCS grant applications & continuations. **Our perspective is also informed from collecting feedback from current and former service members, as well as service host sites, and other stakeholders** associated with our program that have served in informal advisory roles.

The proposed measures prioritize the Maryland Corps' efforts to alleviate regional, racial, and socio-economic disparities across the state by improving the program's recruitment practices. These revisions emphasize HBCUs, trade schools, and high schools with low rates of college attendance post-graduation as critical sources of service personnel. In addition, Maryland Corps board members appointed by the Senate President must possess robust public service credentials, having represented a Maryland-based service organization for at least three years. **This refined appointment process outlined in the bill thus balances the need for program expertise with a strong commitment to the diversity of Maryland Corps participants.**

Critically, this bill also provides the program with the financial resources necessary to carry out its prescribed duties. Here, personnel and recruitment issues are also relevant, as HB0443 stipulates that all participants will receive a stipend of at least \$15 an hour, including health insurance benefits and additional wraparound services. This contributes to overall program participant retention and meets the Maryland Corps commitments to equity and fairness. Perhaps most importantly, the bill also outlines substantial increases to the Maryland Corps Program Fund over the next five years, raising the program's annual budgetary appropriation to \$20 million by fiscal year 2027.

Maryland Out of School Time Network

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These revisions to the Maryland Corps' recruitment policies and budgetary framework promise to substantially increase the program's effectiveness over the next five years. **Higher quality leadership, a diverse and well-compensated workforce, and a reliable program budget can only enhance the Corps ability to address poverty in the state.** The general assembly should support this bill to as a necessary measure to recruit from and support Maryland communities with the greatest need.

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