



One University. A World of Experiences.

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Hello, my name is Lisa Clark, I am the Director of the ASTAR, which is an AmeriCorps program funded through Frostburg State University. I am writing to testify on behalf of HB0546, the Service Year Option Program legislation and educate others on the impact service has had in the communities we serve.

One of the first AmeriCorps programs in the country, ASTAR launched in the 1994/95 program year initially serving the two westernmost counties in Maryland. Since then, we have become a statewide program.

I have been with ASTAR for 28 years and during that time, ASTAR has placed nearly 2000 AmeriCorps members with more than 75 community organizations. During their terms of service, ASTAR AmeriCorps members enable these organizations to better serve their communities. What's more, many of these organizations have permanently hired their AmeriCorps members, making AmeriCorps service a career pathway for young Marylanders who may have otherwise left their communities to find employment.

At ASTAR, we are proud of our history of providing AmeriCorps members with meaningful service opportunities. For example, adjudicated youth have served as AmeriCorps members while serving their time. There is a saying in AmeriCorps, which is that, simply put, service heals. We saw that among adjudicated youth, who are able to give back to their communities, develop job skills and receive community college credit.

ASTAR also has an innovative program in which first year students in a living, learning, serving community at Frostburg State University serve as AmeriCorps members. These students, most of whom are first generation and/or low-income, engage in service-learning projects together, forming lifelong friendships and a deep understanding of civic engagement.

Throughout my 28 years in this field, I have seen the good that AmeriCorps can do, and I know how difficult and important it is to manage AmeriCorps programs properly. During this time, I have championed AmeriCorps programming in Maryland, and I have provided support and guidance to my peers throughout the field. I have also advised staff within the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism, and I appreciate the importance of a strong, statewide service program. That's why I am excited at the prospect of Maryland Corps and what it can bring to the youth of Maryland. I have a vision for building this program to run parallel with the existing Maryland AmeriCorps programs. I am eager to share and implement this vision. With the right support, Maryland Corps will strengthen the service infrastructure in our state, providing opportunities for youth to explore career paths, develop job skills and give back to the community.

I have seen firsthand how service transforms people and communities. I have served alongside my AmeriCorps members and witnessed moments of grace as well as lasting change. I have seen AmeriCorps members finish their terms of service and become employed by their service sites. I



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have cried with members when they have struggled and when they have succeeded. In other words, service is not an abstract idea to me. I've lived it alongside my AmeriCorps members, and I truly believe I learned as much from them as they did from me. I am a better person today because I was given the opportunity to serve as the Director of the ASTAR AmeriCorps program.

Service, like learning, should be a lifelong experience. It should be ingrained in you, and you do it just because it's automatic, not because you are told to. ASTAR and other AmeriCorps programs have offered this experience to thousands of Marylanders, and I would love to see Maryland Corps increase opportunities to serve. For this to happen, I believe Maryland Corps should be launched in collaboration with the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism as they move into the new department developed by Governor Moore, Department of Service and Civic Innovation.

Young people are our future. Let's give them every opportunity to serve, and to do so while earning a decent living allowance. Let's make service a pathway to careers as teachers, first responders, social workers, nurses, and community leaders. Let's give our youth options and guide them in strengthening Maryland. Service is for everyone, and everyone should serve.