Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2005

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman
LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
2358 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Regula and Ranking Member Obey:

We are writing in support of funding in fiscal year (FY) 2006 for the programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service. As an independent federal agency, the Corporation is responsible for some of the most important and effective programs that engage our nation's citizens of all ages to serve one another. These programs include Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and Senior Corps.

The Corporation's programs support President Bush's Call to Service, and his goal of having every person in America dedicate at least two years or 4,000 hours during their lifetime to the service of others. In so doing, these programs leverage millions of additional private-sector dollars from corporations and foundations to meet local and state needs. Over the last several years, Congress has taken strong action to improve the management of the Corporation, the President has installed a new leadership team, and the Corporation has embarked on a rulemaking process that will ultimately affect virtually every aspect of the Corporation's activities.

Learn and Serve America is a competitive grant program for K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and community-based and faith-based organizations. It supports efforts to integrate community service with academic study to improve learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Learn and Serve grants are used to create new programs, improve or replicate existing programs, and provide training and development to faculty, staff, and volunteers. Unfortunately, funding for the program has been frozen at $43 million for the past decade. We support providing $46 million for Learn and Serve America in FY 2006, including an additional $2 million for teacher training (as proposed by President Bush in his FY2005 budget request) and $1 million to support rigorous, scientifically-based service-learning research.

AmeriCorps State and National is a network of service programs whose members serve in more than 900 local and state nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and faith-based organizations. State Commissions distribute and monitor 75 percent of the grants to local nonprofits and agencies, with one fourth of the funding provided to national nonprofits that operate in more than one state. Communities identify their needs and choose the model that is most appropriate to meeting those needs. As with all the programs under the Corporation, this is a bottom up, not a top-down approach. AmeriCorps members who successfully complete a term of service are eligible to receive an education voucher worth up to $4,725. These funds can only be used to pay educational costs at qualified higher education institutions or to repay student loans and are "deposited" in the National Service Trust to insure their availability.

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This year, 75,000 AmeriCorps members are helping to recruit and train more than 600,000 community volunteers to directly serve more than 2,000,000 children and youth. For FY 2006, the President has proposed reducing funding for AmeriCorps grants by more than 10% while increasing funding for the Trust by 13%. We believe it is important to maintain the historical balance between full-time, stipended AmeriCorps members, part-time members, and those who receive only an education voucher. We support providing at least $442 million for AmeriCorps grants and the National Service Trust for FY 2006, equal to the funding level requested by the President for FY 2005. This would allow the Corporation to continue to meet the President's goal of placing 75,000 members in service to communities across America. We support the President's FY 2006 request for AmeriCorps NCCC and AmeriCorps VISTA.

Senior Corps is also a network of programs including Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) that utilize the experience, skills, and talents of older citizens to meet community needs and challenges. Although we appreciate the President's proposal to increase RSVP program funding for FY 2006, that request is significantly below his FY 2005 recommendation of nearly $70 million. We support an appropriation of at least $65 million for the program, including $4.3 million to increase recruitment and programming and $2.16 million for Programs of National Significance as identified by Congress.

The President's budget requests $112 million for the Foster Grandparent Program, which is not sufficient to support any new volunteers in the field. We support an appropriation of at least $116.5 million for the program, including $1.7 million for Programs of National Significance expansion grants and $3.4 million to support and improve quality programming in the field.

While the President requested $47.4 million for the Senior Companion Program, a modest increase over the FY 2005 funding level, we support an appropriation of $51.9 million for the program, including $2 million to fund Programs of National Significance, $4 million to enable more stringent compliance, a small increase for program volunteers, and expansion to underserved areas.

Together these programs provide an array of service opportunities for some of our youngest citizens and some of our oldest. Preserving and growing this continuum of service is vitally important to the material and spiritual health of our country. It reminds us all that we are a community and that government must work with community volunteers, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector if we are to successfully address many of our most pressing problems.

We look forward to working with you to support these national service programs that provide opportunities to engage more Americans as responsible citizens and to solve local problems.

Sincerely,

Harold Ford

Brian Higgins

Rubén Hinojosa

Norm Dicks

Luis V. Gutierrez

Major R. Owens

Jerald Nadler

Carolyn B. Maloney

Jim Jefferson

Henry A. Waxman

Melvin L. Watt

Jim McGovern

Nellie Delahunt

Louise Slaughter

Charles Fattah

Nick Rahall

Sherrod Brown

Bart Gordon

Michael R. McNulty

Bill Lewis

Richard E. Neal

Jim Moran

Charles B Rangel

Jan Schakowsky

Rahm Emanuel

Gus Bradley

Zoe Lofgren

Rita Simmons

Mike Ross

Mike McIntyre

Jim McDermott

Tammy Baldwin

Bob Etheridge

Raúl M Grijalva

Ron Wells

Anna Eshoo

John Lewis

Betty McCollum

Chris Van Hollen

National Service Congressional Caucus Letter to LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee in Support of FY06 Funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service
April 15, 2005

List of Signers:

Rep. Christopher Shays
Rep. Harold Ford
Rep. Brian Higgins
Rep. Rubén Hinojosa
Rep. Norm Dicks
Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez
Rep. Major R. Owens
Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
Rep. William Jefferson
Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Rep. Melvin L. Watt
Rep. Jim Moran
Rep. Charles B. Rangel
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
Rep. Rahm Emanuel
Rep. Jeb Bradley
Rep. Zoe Lofgren
Rep. Rob Simmons
Rep. Mike Ross
Rep. Mike McIntyre
Rep. David Price
Rep. Tom Osborne
Rep. James McGovern
Rep. William Delahunt
Rep. Louise Slaughter
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Rep. Bob Etheridge
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva
Rep. Tom Allen
Rep. Anna Eshoo
Rep. John Lewis
Rep. Betty McCollum
Rep. Chris Van Hollen