



SB 845 - Higher Education - Maryland Corps Program Fund - Alterations
Testimony of Jesse Colvin, CEO of Service Year Alliance
On March 4, 2020
Before the Budget & Taxation Committee

I'm Jesse Colvin, the CEO of Service Year Alliance, and I am proud to offer testimony in support of SB 845.

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.

Before my time at Service Year Alliance, I served in the military as an Army Ranger. I served 4 combat deployments in Afghanistan. My military experience, especially in Afghanistan, is where I learned what is possible when Americans from different walks of life join together to tackle shared problems.

What happens when you share a foxhole — that bond you build — is the same thing that happens when you share a worksite or conservation project or a classroom during a service year. Different foxholes, same bonds.

That's why we're leading the Serve America Together campaign, a campaign to make national service a part of growing up in our country. And that's why I'm thrilled to be here today in Annapolis, where leaders are working to make that a reality here in Maryland.

Leaders like Senate President Bill Ferguson, Senator Shelly Hettleman, and Delegate Sandy Rosenberg have seen first-hand what an incredible opportunity a service year is for young people.

More than 1,400 people serve annually across Maryland today. They serve with organizations like the Latin American Youth Center, which connects young people to career pathways and sets them up for success in college and beyond. And Civic Works YouthBuild, where people aren't just learning construction skills and earning certifications, but they're doing it while rebuilding affordable housing for people in need within their communities.

Not only do service years tackle critical issues in local communities across our state, they are also an effective workforce development tool. In fact, service years have a triple bottom line: they transform lives, improve communities, and resuscitate civic health.

Service years allow young people to learn workplace behaviors and skills, experience a specific field, make connections, and develop the pride that comes with a paycheck.

This bill will revamp Maryland Corps and allow the state legislature to study the potential of expanding service year opportunities in order to enhance Maryland's workforce and shape the careers of the next generation of young Marylanders.

Service Year Alliance is a nationally-oriented organization supporting efforts across the country, and with this bill, Maryland joins New Hampshire as the first states that are taking the bold step to invest in service years to support the current and future needs of employers in the state and ensure that the opportunity to serve is available to every young person in Maryland — and across the country — who wants to make their community a better place to live and work.

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.