



March 16, 2009

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy and Ranking Member Enzi:

The National Council on Aging fully supports the bipartisan "Serve America Act" (S.277). As the Committee also works to reauthorize the National and Community Service Act, we urge that the innovative and modernizing features incorporated into the GIVE Act (H.R. 1388), particularly as they affect the Senior Corps programs, be retained.

First, we are delighted to support key provisions of the Serve America Act that will increase service opportunities for Americans of all ages and at every stage of life. Research completed by the National Council on Aging (NCOA) reinforces the premise that adults 55+ serving in a broad array of national and community service roles can meet specific national challenges such as: tackling the dropout crisis and strengthening our schools; improving energy efficiency; safeguarding the environment; improving health care in low-income communities; expanding economic opportunities for low-income individuals; preparing for and responding to disasters and emergencies, and meeting the needs of at-risk populations including frail older adults and their caregivers.

We also strongly support language in the Senate and House legislation that supports innovation in the nonprofit sector. NCOA is engaged in developing new knowledge and creating innovative tools to harness and measure the human resource potential of adults aged 55 years and older. Through active engagement in new service and work roles, older adults will help transform community-based organizations' efforts to solve our nation's most vexing social problems. One of our partners in this work is Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), which has received an NCOA Models of Significant Service grant for its Generation of Leaders Demonstration. This initiative uses self-directed teams of volunteers to integrate volunteers 55+ into the core professional and managerial functions at ABCD as it continues its work fighting poverty and promoting economic security.

While our support for the themes and provisions of the Act is unwavering, we are writing to request that the Committee preserve and support the provisions in the GIVE Act regarding the National Senior Volunteer Corps as it undertakes reauthorization of national service legislation. In particular, we strongly support and endorse introducing competition to these grants. Having piloted the Foster Grandparent Program, supported the development of the Senior Companion and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs, and worked closely with these programs for over four decades, we believe that it is time to update and modernize these national program models. Specifically, we are concerned that without the recommended changes, these programs will not keep pace with the changing characteristics of future generations of eligible participants or the challenging social issues we now face. Introducing a scheduled competition for these grants will achieve the following key improvements:

- Enable the Corporation for National Service to more easily introduce emerging best practices and principles thereby keeping the program models current and responsive;
- Ease the administrative burden of Federal Program Managers in identifying the most appropriate and effective community organization to serve as the program's sponsor by creating an alternative to adverse actions to unseat a sponsor;

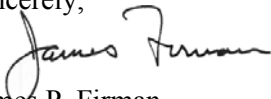
- Provide the local community, through the local Advisory Council for each program, the ability to assess the needs of the community and recommend changes they feel are in the best interests of program participants and beneficiaries;
- Recognize that the most meritorious projects are funded through a competitive process; and
- Foster innovation and create increased visibility and support by the local community in support of the program.

The National Council on Aging congratulates the work of the Senate and the House to make strengthening and expanding national service and civic engagement a key priority in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. We believe this act is an investment in our Nation's future at a time when new types and greatly expanded opportunities for citizen service are desperately needed to meet increasing human and social needs. As the Senate considers the final version of S.277 we encourage you to take this opportunity to position and strengthen the National Senior Service Corps for the future.

NCOA's work in national and community service clearly demonstrates that adults approaching retirement age are concerned about the future of the country and want to give back – but in new ways with more impact. Many of them will be interested in exploring service opportunities, but may need some incentive and encouragement to get involved. NCOA believes that our nation should adopt public policies that empower older adults to make a commitment to remain active citizens in their communities in ways that address critical human needs. We believe the provisions of the GIVE Act with its recommendations for modernizing the National Senior Corps does just that.

We look forward to providing any additional support needed to assure passage of the Serve America Act. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



James P. Firman

cc: Chairman George Miller and Ranking Member Howard P. McKeon