



Ohio Senate Finance – Workforce Subcommittee

April 28, 2015

Good morning Chairman Beagle and members of the committee. My name is William Hall and I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism, which is more commonly known as ServeOhio. The Commission was established by the Ohio Legislature in 1994 and operates under authority pursuant to Section 121.40 of the Ohio Revised Code.

The Commission directs and administers AmeriCorps programming in Ohio and promotes service and volunteer engagement as tools for addressing critical local community and statewide needs. Federal law requires, as a condition for receipt of AmeriCorps funding, that a state service commission be maintained to administer the program, ensuring each state the opportunity to coordinate AmeriCorps with its own programmatic priorities. The Commission is governed by a board of 21 members. Four members are representatives of state agencies (Department of Education, Department of Aging, Department of Youth Services and the Board of Regents); 15 are appointed by the governor; and two are representatives of the Senate and House Education Committees (Senator Peggy Lehner and Representative Bill Hayes). The Commission presently employs six full-time employees.

Federal regulations require that state service commission operations be funded under a 50-50 cost share between the state and the federal government; federal operating appropriations are limited to an amount equal to the state contribution. State general revenue funds are only utilized to support the roles and responsibilities of the Commission; federal funds support all AmeriCorps programmatic activity. Federal pass-through funding to the Commission has totaled over \$19 million during the past three program years. Adding the value of local matching funds (\$13 million) and the post-service education awards payable to AmeriCorps Members (\$10 million); the three-year economic impact for Ohio exceeds \$40 million. In sum, AmeriCorps continues to be a strong investment for the State of Ohio as the state currently receives \$22 in federal funds for every state dollar invested.

ServeOhio is supportive of the original FY 2016-2017 Operating Budget language. Recent changes made within the House version moving the Commission under the auspices of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives would require ServeOhio to restructure our current financial reporting systems. In addition, moving the Commission's dedicated budget line into the larger context of the Governor's Office budget eliminates the segregation of funds required by our federal funder, the Corporation for National and Community Service, to document our required match. There are no cost-savings associated with the House language. ServeOhio and the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives enjoy a healthy working relationship; neither party has requested the change. Again, for these reasons, we are requesting a return to the original budget language.

The mission of ServeOhio is to *Strengthen Ohio Communities through AmeriCorps and Volunteer Engagement*. AmeriCorps is the signature program of the Commission. AmeriCorps programs provide opportunities for Americans to make an intensive commitment to serve their communities as "AmeriCorps Members" in projects developed at the local level to address locally-defined problems. A full-time AmeriCorps Member serves a minimum of 1,700 hours over a 10 – 12 month period. In the current program year, over 800 Ohio AmeriCorps Members will provide over 1.1 million hours of direct service in local communities. AmeriCorps Members receive a modest living stipend during their term and an education award upon successful

completion of their service. The education award is equal to the current Pell grant and can be utilized for future higher education pursuits or to pay off qualified student loans. Education awards earned by Ohio AmeriCorps Members in the current program year will exceed \$3.8 million. Since the inception of AmeriCorps and the Commission in 1994, over 14,000 Ohio AmeriCorps Members have served over 12.5 million hours and earned more than \$37 million in education awards. AmeriCorps in itself is an intensive workforce development programming – providing individuals valuable skills and resources to fulfill career and educational objectives.

It is the role of the Commission to award, administer and monitor the funds supporting AmeriCorps Members and the service activities in which the AmeriCorps Members are engaged. Each year the Commission operates two AmeriCorps grant competitions (Spring and Fall); providing local and statewide organizations (nonprofit, governmental, faith-based) the opportunity to apply for AmeriCorps funds to meet local needs. The Commission awards AmeriCorps grants in the areas of education; economic opportunity; healthy futures; environmental stewardship; disaster services; veterans and military families; and capacity building. AmeriCorps programs must define specific, quantifiable objectives that will be achieved and submit quarterly progress reports to the Commission. Proactive financial and programmatic monitoring by Commission staff ensures compliance with federal grants management regulations, achievement of programmatic objectives, and intervention and assistance in the event of non-compliance or under-performance. In our current program cycle, the Commission awarded \$6.6 million to support 23 AmeriCorps programs distributed across the state. Local communities are matching an additional \$4.4 million to support project objectives.

Our current AmeriCorps portfolio invests 61% of its funding – \$4.1 million – to support academic achievement. Addressing the education continuum of kindergarten readiness to college completion, our programs engage hundreds of AmeriCorps Members as teachers, tutors, mentors and coaches – helping thousands of Ohio students succeed in school and preparing them to effectively participate in Ohio’s workforce.

- The *Ohio Reading Corps* has 120 AmeriCorps members providing individualized literacy interventions to over 2,000 students in Kindergarten through Grade 3, in direct support of the Ohio Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Operating in over 90 schools across the state, the project is designed to serve students in need of literacy services but who do not qualify for Title I tutors. In the last completed program year, 65% of the students who received services from Ohio Reading Corps members met grade-level benchmarks or demonstrated more than one year of academic growth.
- Over 100 AmeriCorps Members are serving as tutors and mentors with the goals of improving academic achievement and graduation rates. In Columbus Public Schools and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, our *City Year* programs operate school-wide interventions in literacy, math, attendance, and behavior to 850 students in grades 3-9 identified as high-risk for non-completion. In Dayton and Montgomery County, AmeriCorps Members expand and enhance mentoring services by coordinating in-school and afterschool programs designed to increase student attendance and decrease high school dropout rates.
- *Teach for America Ohio* has 180 AmeriCorps Members placed in Northeast and Southwest Ohio serving over 9,000 students in low-performing schools. In the last completed program year, 39% of the students who received services from Teach for America members demonstrated increased performance at mastering academic content standards.
- Statewide, 70 AmeriCorps Members are serving with 54 local college access organizations as *Ohio College Guides* to provide college advising and career mentoring to over 12,500 students in low-wealth

school districts. AmeriCorps Member service activities include assistance with completing the FAFSA, reviewing college application materials, and researching scholarship opportunities for individual students. In the last completed program year, 54% of the high school seniors who received services from these AmeriCorps Members enrolled in a post-secondary institution.

- The *Ohio College Completion Corps* has 27 AmeriCorps Members placed on 12 community college campuses across the state. These members will serve over 5,000 community college students enrolled in developmental classes. In the last completed program year, 32% of the community college students who received services from these AmeriCorps Members progressed from developmental to college-level coursework.

The Commission is also committed to developing high-quality AmeriCorps programs that expand workforce opportunities for underserved and disadvantaged populations. New programs in Youngstown (Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation) and Dayton (University of Dayton) are engaging Opportunity Youth as AmeriCorps Members – helping these individuals gain necessary employment skills and obtain resources for future education endeavors. Programs in Cincinnati (Santa Maria Community Services) and Cleveland (University Settlement) have AmeriCorps Members serving community members with high barriers to employment by focusing on GED preparation and employment coaching. AmeriCorps Members are also focusing on the economic needs of non-urban communities – increasing digital literacy in populations served by remote public libraries (State Library of Ohio) and building a future workforce of community health care professionals by addressing local health concerns in small-town Ohio (Northeast Ohio Medical University).

ServeOhio also retains a broader mission to expand and strengthen volunteer engagement in Ohio. AmeriCorps is a vital component of this work; in the last program year, AmeriCorps Members mobilized over 15,000 community volunteers who provided over 89,000 hours of volunteer service. In addition, the Commission administers a private-public partnership called *Stewards of Service*, which increases the capacity of local volunteer mobilizers. The *Stewards of Service* initiative includes project funds for national days of service such as MLK Day, Global Youth Service Day, and Make A Difference Day; last year these funds supported 22 local service projects, engaging over 3,200 community volunteers who provided over 10,000 hours of volunteer service. This initiative also provides support for the annual Ohio Conference on Service and Volunteerism which provides comprehensive professional development in the field of volunteer administration, as well as, the Commission's annual ServeOhio Awards which recognize outstanding volunteer achievement.

The Commission has consistently proven to be a good steward of public funds – realigning staff and cutting operating expenses to maximize our state support in the most cost-effective manner. With your continued support, Commission staff will be able to develop, fund and monitor AmeriCorps programs throughout Ohio that focus on the needs of local communities and the priorities of our state as a whole. More AmeriCorps member positions in Ohio brings opportunity for more Ohioans to build professional skills and secure additional higher education resources while having a profound, measureable impact in the communities in which they live.

AmeriCorps is an exceptional program that combines federal, state and local resources to address critical community issues – increasing the capacity of local nonprofit, faith-based and educational institutions to create positive and permanent change. The Commission is the catalyst to advance high-quality AmeriCorps programming and volunteer engagement in Ohio.

Thank you for your support and this opportunity to share this overview of the Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism. We would be happy to respond to any questions at this time.