

## Ohio Senate Education Committee

April 26, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman Brenner, Ranking Minority Member Ingram 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. We appreciate the opportunity to come before you today to discuss our mission and work.

Established in 1994, ServeOhio is charged with administering AmeriCorps programs and supporting volunteer engagement in Ohio. Federal legislation ensures that states have a key role in determining the allocation of national service resources via state service commissions. ServeOhio functions as Ohio's state service commission.

### AMERICORPS

One of the commission's primary roles is the funding and administration of AmeriCorps programs in Ohio. ServeOhio makes AmeriCorps local by working with Ohio communities to define critical needs and develop AmeriCorps programming as an intervention to address those needs. In addition, ServeOhio sets policy and program priorities; competitively awards grants to local organizations; provides training and technical assistance to program staff and AmeriCorps Members; monitors and evaluates grantees to ensure quality and compliance with federal and state laws.

AmeriCorps provides opportunities for Americans to make an intensive commitment to serve their communities as AmeriCorps "members" in projects developed to address locally defined problems. ServeOhio supports AmeriCorps programs that increase academic achievement, expand economic opportunity, and improve health and environmental conditions. A fulltime AmeriCorps Member serves 1,700 hours within in a 10-to-12-month service term – earning a modest living allowance and education award upon successful completion. ***In the current program year, over 1,000 AmeriCorps Members will provide 1.2 million hours of service at 500 sites across Ohio.***

During this program cycle we have invested \$7.4 million to increase academic success across the state. From our City Year programs in Cleveland and Columbus at 154 members strong and our statewide Ohio Reading and Math Corps at 120 members, our members are serving as tutors, coaches, mentors and teachers boosting attendance, reading scores and completion rates. Students served by AmeriCorps Members consistently demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement – ranging from a basic metric of increasing their school attendance to demonstrating over a year of growth in academic performance.

In addition to providing intensive service, AmeriCorps is a proven workforce development strategy – providing a pathway to employment for thousands of Ohioans over the past 30 years. ***This service year alone, Ohio AmeriCorps Members will receive over 120,000 hours of professional development and earn over \$4.5 million in education awards that can be used for post-secondary education or qualified student loans.***

## VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

ServeOhio also works to increase the quantity and quality of community volunteer engagement across the state by providing resources and professional development. We work directly with volunteer program administrators at nonprofit, government, and community organizations to provide them with the tools and skills they need to strategically engage volunteers. In this role, ServeOhio helps community organizations build capacity to increase their volunteer recruitment efforts, ultimately enabling more volunteers to serve communities in need.

Our National Days of Service Project Grants – MLK Day (January), Global Youth Service Day (April), ServeOhio Day (June) and Make A Difference Day (October) – provides support to over 65 community projects that engage thousands of volunteers each year. In addition, our Get Connected portal connects volunteers and organizations; organizations can post volunteer opportunities to recruit individuals and individuals can access opportunities that best fit their interests. ServeOhio works with 11 regional partners, hundreds of local organizations, and several state agencies to provide meaningful, productive connections between volunteers and the communities in which they reside.

ServeOhio is expanding our work in youth service in the current year and upcoming biennium. Youth who volunteer have improved academic achievement with higher grades, increased motivation and an elevated attitude towards school. Positive longterm outcomes for students are also noted with improved physical and mental health; increased self-esteem which leads to stronger social ties and reduced isolation; and more community involvement in adulthood. All of these factors impact our state's priority to increase student engagement which in turn produces higher school attendance and improved academic achievement.

In the last year ServeOhio conducted a comprehensive Youth Service Landscape Analysis to determine the current level of youth service activity within the state, the challenges in providing service opportunities for youth and the supports needed to expand youth service activity. In response to those findings, ServeOhio is launching a new platform that is specifically tailored to youth service – allowing schools and community organizations to share opportunities while tracking engagement analytics that will provide students a transcript of their service activities to utilize in future employment, higher education applications, and to achieve the Ohio Community Service Diploma Seal. In addition, a Youth Service Toolkit is being developed with approximately 50 plug-and-play service projects that can be adapted to different grade levels and student interests. These projects will be developed in partnership with detail and expertise specific to Ohio with a focus on food and housing insecurity; physical and mental health; and environmental stewardship.

We know that effective volunteer management is both a science and an art. ServeOhio provides ongoing professional development to strengthen the capacity of organizations to recruit, train, manage and retain volunteers. In the past year, over 450 volunteer professionals participated in our six-week Volunteer Engagement Fundamentals course, Volunteer Center Community of Practice, and the ServeOhio Conference on Service and Volunteerism. ***Volunteerism is a key measurement of our state's civic well-being. Over 2.2 million Ohioans volunteered in their local communities last year alone – providing 165 million hours of service with an economic impact of more than \$4.5 billion.***

## **BUDGET**

ServeOhio is primarily funded by our federal grantor – the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). All of our AmeriCorps program funding -- \$12.7 million in the current program year supporting 1,00+ AmeriCorps Members – originates at CNCS; such funds are distributed to state service commissions through a combination of formula and competitive processes. In addition, CNCS provides funding to ServeOhio to support the development and administration of AmeriCorps programming (Commission Support Grant and Commission Investment Fund) and to increase community volunteer engagement (Volunteer Generation Fund).

We are supportive of the state budget as introduced (\$685,106 in FY24 and \$693,988 in FY25). The increases afforded to ServeOhio will fully meet our mandated federal administrative match, as well as, position our organization to expand current initiatives that meet state and local priorities. In the current budget year, 89.5% of ServeOhio funds are distributed via grants to local communities; 10.5% are utilized for staffing and expenses related to grant oversight. ServeOhio represents a good financial investment for the state – consistently returning over \$20 in federal funding for every state dollar expended. But most importantly ServeOhio programming represents an effective strategy in addressing critical issues and building civic engagement.

Thank you for your continued support of national service and volunteer engagement in Ohio. Again, we appreciate the opportunity to share this overview of our work and would be happy to respond to any questions at this time.