

## Ohio House of Representatives – Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development & Natural Resources February 17, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Kick, Ranking Minority Member O'Brien 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. I appreciate the opportunity to come before you this afternoon 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

The commission's primary role 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 10-12 month service term – earning a modest living allowance and education award upon successful completion. ***In the current program year, over 900 AmeriCorps Members will provide 1.2 million hours of service at 500 sites across Ohio.***

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 27 years. ***This service year alone, Ohio AmeriCorps Members will receive over 130,000 hours of professional development and earn over \$4.2 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 throughout Ohio. 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 60 community projects that engage thousands of volunteers each year.

In 2020 ServeOhio launched Get Connected – the only free statewide volunteer engagement portal that allows local nonprofit organizations to recruit and manage volunteers in an efficient and effective manner. ServeOhio is working with both regional and local volunteer mobilizers to build the infrastructure of the platform for

maximum utilization and impact. Once fully optimized, Get Connected will be able to serve as an aggregator to launch statewide initiatives related to specific needs, such as academic recovery and food insecurity, and to assist students in earning diploma seals for community service.

## **COVID-19 RESPONSE**

Like the rest of the world, AmeriCorps and volunteerism has been upended by the global pandemic. ServeOhio has been able to maintain a full range of services to our grantees and community partners. We have worked closely with field staff to reposition AmeriCorps Members to best serve the needs of their local communities while also meeting the objectives outlined in their approved grants. Many of our academic-based programs no longer had onsite access to students in schools or other public settings; however, members quickly transitioned to providing the same tutoring and mentoring services in a virtual format and in academic hubs. Our community-based programs directly addressed COVID-19 needs by assisting with emergency food distribution and performing contact tracing in partnership with local health departments.

ServeOhio quickly pivoted our planned volunteer engagement funding to support urgent needs by transitioning our traditional National Days of Service project funds to Community Resilience Grants. In a matter of weeks, we funded 36 grassroots projects across the state dedicated to basic human needs. Volunteer organizations utilized the grant money to subsidize a variety of projects, such as, organizing food drop off programs for at risk populations, coordinating drives for essential items, creating cards/letters for isolated older adults, and providing educational activities for children to continue learning outside of school. ServeOhio provided not only the funding, but also the guidance on how to perform service activities in accordance with safety protocols.

Increasing AmeriCorps presence in schools and education-related nonprofits now and post-pandemic will be crucial to overcoming longterm achievement gaps created by the virus. In addition, our new Get Connected volunteer platform is helping individuals find safe, impactful opportunities to serve – meeting essential needs in the communities in which they live. AmeriCorps and volunteer engagement will be crucial to the immediate and longterm recovery of nonprofit organizations and schools throughout the state.

## **BUDGET**

ServeOhio is primarily funded by our federal grantor – the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). All of our AmeriCorps program funding -- \$8.8 million in the current program year supporting 900+ 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 (\$529,00 in both FY22 and FY23). The increases afforded to ServeOhio will fully meet our mandated federal match, as well as, position our organization to accept and distribute additional federal resources relative to COVID-19 recovery. ServeOhio represents a good financial investment for the state – consistently returning over \$30 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 ServeOhio. I appreciate the opportunity to share this overview of our work and would be happy to respond to any questions at this time.