

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin, colleagues: Unveil bipartisan bill to expand national service dramatically in next COVID-19 relief package

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) helped introduce bipartisan legislation, led by Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Roger Wicker (R-MS), to expand national service programs significantly to help the country respond to and recover from the public health, economic, and social crises facing the nation in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The *Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act* would double the number of AmeriCorps positions available this year to 150,000 and provide a total of 600,000 service opportunities nationwide over the next three years to unemployed youth and others looking to assist their communities. These positions could support a variety of response and recovery efforts based on community needs, including expanding food pantry capacity, mentoring and tutoring at-risk students, bridging health inequities by expanding access to COVID-19 screening and testing, and more. The legislation is also cosponsored by Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Jack Reed (D-RI), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), John Cornyn (R-TX), Angus King (I-ME), and Susan Collins (R-ME).

“Wisconsinites have always been committed to serving their communities, and many folks in our state have answered the call to serve to combat COVID-19 throughout our neighborhoods. Now is the time to scale up our national service programs so those who want to take action and help our communities get through

this pandemic have the opportunity to do so,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “I’m proud to cosponsor this bipartisan legislation that will help service organizations expand their reach to engage more people and bring communities together to combat this public health crisis, save lives and move our country forward.”

“Thousands of young people across the country are calling for greater opportunity and for new and meaningful engagement to address persistent inequities that have only been exacerbated by COVID-19,” **Senator Coons said.** “Now is the time to mobilize that energy to make our communities stronger and healthier for everyone. The CORPS Act will empower Americans to give back to their communities while earning a college opportunity and valuable skills for the future. I’m pleased to introduce this bipartisan bill with Senator Wicker and my colleagues at this critical time and look forward to working with them to include it in the next relief package considered by the Senate.”

“Helping our nation respond to and recover from the coronavirus outbreak will require an all-hands approach,” **Senator Wicker said.** “Boosting the ranks of our service corps is a cost-efficient way to get communities the help they need. I am glad to join Senator Coons in introducing the CORPS Act, which would enhance our national service programs and provide participants with the resources they need to endure this crisis. With their contributions, I am hopeful our nation can emerge stronger than ever before.”

“The CORPS Act introduced today by Senators Coons, Wicker, Booker, Graham, Reed, Rubio, Duckworth, Hyde-Smith, Harris, Cassidy, Baldwin, Cornyn, King, and Collins underscores the tremendous bipartisan support for AmeriCorps and Senior Corps and the critical role these programs are playing in helping their communities respond to and recover from COVID-19,” **said AnnMaura Connolly, President of Voices for National Service.** “The CORPS Act invests in the strong and capable national service infrastructure that has been deploying citizens of every background in service to their communities for decades. In addition to expanding AmeriCorps and strengthening Senior Corps to help communities with food distribution, supporting students, ensuring that medically vulnerable people continue to receive their medications and supporting public health needs, The CORPS Act will give young people experience, skills, a living stipend and post-service education scholarship at a critical time. The Voices for National Service Community is deeply grateful to Senator Coons, Senator Wicker and their colleagues for their leadership and bold vision for the vital role that national service can play in helping our communities and our country respond to and recover from this pandemic.”

“America’s Service Commissions applauds the leadership of the bipartisan CORPS Act for recognizing service as a strategic solution to addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic through the CORPS Act. Expanding AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the Volunteer Generation Fund is essential to engaging the millions of Americans who want to serve their country right now in response to this crisis,” **said Kaira Esgate, CEO of America’s Service Commissions (ASC).** “The CORPS Act will enable governors to help more underserved and rural communities, and the flexibility to get national service boots-on-the-ground quickly. Our network of governor-led state service commissions can provide the local infrastructure to get this done, and stands ready to implement the CORPS Act across every state.”

“At a time when local communities are in desperate need of additional support to tackle the public health and economic crises due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CORPS Act is helping meet these needs by expanding national service to support our communities as they respond and recover,” **said Jesse Colvin, CEO of Service Year Alliance.** “Not only can national service programs like AmeriCorps support critical public health initiatives, combat food insecurity, and fight learning loss, but by mobilizing hundreds of thousands of Americans into national service, we are putting people back to work, addressing record unemployment, and creating pathways to economic opportunity for people of all backgrounds. There’s never been a more important moment to invest in national service, and Service Year Alliance is proud to support this pivotal bipartisan legislation.”

“We know that the expansion of AmeriCorps will make a real difference in local communities,” **said Curt Ellis, CEO of FoodCorps.** “We have seen the many ways that AmeriCorps members who share backgrounds, life experiences and relationships with the communities they serve deliver greater impact. So, we are especially encouraged to see the support this bill provides toward broadening access to national service, including increasing service member stipends and expanding local outreach to diverse applicants. We’re pleased to support this bipartisan proposal and thank Sens. Wicker and Coons for their commitment to investing in critical programs like ours in healthy food access that will help our nation as we recover from COVID-19.”

“Catholic Volunteer Network believes in the transformative power of full-time volunteer service. We welcome chances to collaborate in new ways that empower more volunteers and strengthen communities across the country,” **said Yonce Shelton, Executive Director of Catholic Volunteer Network.** “Catholic

Volunteer Network supports the CORPS Act because we know the desire of so many young adults across this country to help communities recover from COVID-19. Helping them put faith in action for the common good can help our nation recover and become stronger than ever. Through service experiences on the front lines, volunteers become leaders who will guide communities in a range of ways for decades to come. Young people of faith want to commit. They want to transform. They want to be part of the solution. The CORPS Act can help them achieve those goals.”

“During the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt said that no country can afford the waste of human resources. Now is a time for our country to come together in a bipartisan manner to address the COVID-19 crisis. Expanding AmeriCorps to its authorized level, will help promote national service as a means to mobilize and unite the American people to confront a myriad of needs, ranging from food pantry operations to public health initiatives, to promoting jobs for youth in conservation and providing workforce and reemployment services,” **said Mary Ellen Sprenkel, President and CEO of The Corps Network.** “We extend our appreciation to Senators Coons, Wicker, Booker, Graham, Reed, Rubio, Duckworth, Hyde-Smith, Harris, Cassidy, Baldwin, Cornyn, King, and Collins for introducing The CORPS Act and for championing the critical role AmeriCorps and Senior Corps can play in helping our country through these unprecedented times.”

“We are in a moment in our nation’s history that demands two clear actions – care and connection. Those fundamental ideas are encompassed in the national service provisions of the CORPS Act. As the President of Delaware State University, I can say with great certainty that our students are ready to answer the CORPS Act call. Like all Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), many of our students are from communities hardest hit by health and economic disparities. Others are compelled to put ‘service above self’ because of unrelenting systemic inequalities. And to a person, all of them have had enough,” **said DSU President Tony Allen.** “America needs these young voices NOW – a representative group of citizens who not only want better for themselves and their communities but are also determined to do something about it.”

“In this time of tremendous uncertainty, in the midst of this ongoing health emergency, it is imperative that we use this opportunity to reinvest in our nation’s future as we rebuild,” **said Thurgood Marshall College Fund, President and CEO, Harry L. Williams.** “Through significantly expanding our national service programs and increasing both the living allowance and the educational benefit, the

Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act tears down barriers that many service-minded low-income students have to participating in these critical programs while opening the doors of education to thousands more students.”

The bill has gained the support of more than 150 additional organizations, including City Year, Habitat for Humanity International, Hunger Free America, Jumpstart, National Health Corps, National Senior Corps Association, National Youth Leadership Council, and YouthBuild. The full list of supportive organizations is available [here](#).

**Specifically, the *CORPS Act* would:**

- Fund national service positions for a three-year response and recovery period and grow them to the level authorized in CNCS’s bipartisan, most recent reauthorization. Under the CORPS Act, the number of positions could grow from 75,000 to 150,000 the first year and then steadily to 250,000 by year three.
- Provide flexibilities for programs to grow and respond quickly to dynamic local recovery needs.
- Prioritize funding for activities directly related to our response and recovery, such as:
  - o Public health services,
  - o Programs that support economic opportunity,
  - o Education support (including for adult learners), and
  - o Services that combat nutrition insecurity.
- Prioritize expanding programs and services in rural and high poverty communities.
- Help organizations that have not previously hosted AmeriCorps members access the program.
- Ensure that individuals’ financial resources do not limit participation by temporarily increasing the AmeriCorps living allowance to 175 percent of the federal poverty line and tying the value of the Segal Education Award to twice the value of the maximum Pell grant, harmonizing the treatment of both with other programs by making them nontaxable.

- Fund new online tools for Senior Corps to safely move to a teleservice model.
- Encourage participation by members of low-income and underrepresented communities and extend priority enrollment to Peace Corps, U.S. Fulbright, and AmeriCorps participants whose service or grants was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Invite participation by a diverse range of Americans by launching an awareness and outreach campaign on response service opportunities and supporting the Volunteer Generation Fund.

More information about this legislation is available [here](#).