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Washington - Responding to what he called "a moment for national service," Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., introduced four bills Tuesday that would increase federal spending for community volunteer initiatives.

The ambitious legislation would "create the architecture and the structure that will serve as the invitation for everyone to serve," Dodd said. The bills would target everyone from schoolchildren to the elderly and aim to create new bases of volunteers beyond the usual young-adult pool of service-program participants.

Two bills, the Summer of Service Act and the Semester of Service Act, would allow middle school and high school students to earn credits or stipends for their community-service programs.

The Encore Service Act would provide stipends and education awards to Americans 50 and older in exchange for service in their communities.

The Action Act would raise the amount awarded to AmeriCorps volunteers to pay for college tuition from the current \$4,725 to \$6,585 to reflect the current average tuition at a four-year college.

The legislation was met with hope and some trepidation by those familiar with Connecticut's financially strapped schools and departments, who say that federal dollars could jump-start some stalled community-service initiatives in the state.

Robert Rader, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, said federal dollars for such programs could give a boost to education initiatives that the state has been considering for years. In its 2006 secondary-school reform plan, known as the Connecticut Plan, In its 2008 secondary school reform plan, the state Department of Education considered a capstone project requirement for graduating seniors that could be fulfilled by a service project, but the plan has not been implemented because of its cost.

"Many of the aspects of that secondary school reform bill were being held for now because of the economic climate," Rader said.

"Many boards have required students to take part in service activities and have found that these are very positive for the students as well as for the communities," Rader said. "But under the present financial difficulties, schools would have to look very carefully" at adding volunteer projects to their graduation requirements.

The Encore Act for volunteers 50 or older could also help the state's social services agencies, according to Robert J. Norton, director of communications for the Connecticut Commission on Aging.

One provision would give volunteers \$1,000 for 250 to 500 hours of service in a year. Another would create a fellowship for older Americans to serve in management positions at nonprofit or public institutions.

With large numbers of young people leaving Connecticut and the average age in the state climbing rapidly, the state should welcome federal programs that help older workers, Norton said.

"We have a million people who are baby boomers, almost a third of the overall population of the state," Norton said. "Keeping them engaged in the work force either full or part-time or in volunteer pursuits is critical."

Dodd said he was reintroducing the bills-which he sponsored but failed to bring to a vote in 2007- in response to President Obama's call in his inaugural address for national service. He said it echoed John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech that inspired him to serve in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic from 1966 to 1968.

"People ask me why I joined - I joined because the president asked," Dodd said. "We've got a president who's asking."

The Senate bills, co-sponsored by Thad Cochran, R-Miss., are companion legislation to bills Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-3rd District, introduced Tuesday in the House.

DeLauro praised the bills for providing volunteer opportunities that would both improve communities and give Americans eager to serve the financial means to do so.

"If we are serious about getting this nation back on track, we need to give everyone the opportunity to do their part," DeLauro said.

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