



State of Connecticut

SENATE

**Testimony of Senator Beth Bye and Senator Mae Flexer
In Support of S.B. 445, *An Act Concerning A Plan For The Connecticorps
Program***

**Joint Committee on Labor and Public Employees
February 17, 2015**

Senator Winfield, Representative Tercyak, Senator Osten, Representative Cuevas,
Senator Hwang, Representative Rutigliano:

My name is Beth Bye, State Senator representing the fifth district. I am co-submitting this testimony with Senator Mae Flexer, State Senator representing the twenty-ninth district, who could not be here to speak in person.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak before you today in support of SB 445 regarding the concept of a Connecticorps program.

Service programs have become a widespread means of tackling global issues and widening perspectives to other ways of living. Currently, 6,818 individuals are serving as volunteers for the Peace Corps, an organization that has seen nearly 220,000 Americans living and assisting communities in 140 countries. Other similar programs are based in religious traditions of service, simplicity, and commitment to social justice. 323 volunteers for the American based Jesuit Volunteers Corps, for instance, worked to empower local organizations and communities at the grassroots level, both domestically and abroad, in the 2013-2014 year.

Upon completion of their service work, many individuals become eligible for scholarships and acceptance consideration for future graduate school pursuits and professional employment opportunities. They are also part of a nationwide network of former service members who can provide assistance with taking that next step for professional personal advancement. There are 12,000 former Jesuit Volunteer Corps members alone spread across the country.

The idea of this bill is to create a plan for a localized service program right here in Connecticut. Such a program can serve many purposes:

- It can help students build critical job skills and gain valuable experience.
- It can help students retire student loan debt.
- It can help young people participate in service projects, and work in helping professions.

Research shows that this kind of work benefits young people emotionally and physically. According to a report in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, entitled *Volunteer work and well-being*, by Thoits and Hewitt, service work enhances six aspects of personal well-being, including happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, physical health, and depression.

Finally, such work can support state funded non-profit programs and public works projects with eager young workers.

For this session, the bill before you is a start. It is mine and Senator Flexer's hope that the Department of Labor and workforce boards and non-profits will see the benefits of considering such a program.

As my children age out of college, I have watched many of their friends go off to work on service projects in the United States and abroad. Upon their return, they describe the work as life changing. These experiences frequently change their work trajectories and help them land high quality jobs.

Meanwhile, other students who are graduating from community colleges and Connecticut's four-year institutions can benefit from a clearer path to service programs. Connecticorps can provide such a path. Senator Flexer and I are open to any questions or suggestions the members might have.

Thank you.

Beth Bye and Mae Flexer