



Proposed cuts to City Year program would do most harm to at-risk kids in under-resourced schools

Proposed 50% cuts to AmeriCorps program would devastate City Year program, whose members give one year of service to local schools. City Year's "success coaches" have been shown to help students raise reading, math and attendance levels. And many members continue on to become school teachers.

by [Arielle McConduit Ashley and Dr. Luz Randolph](#)

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"You can teach me stuff like vowels, words, and reading. You can teach me how to be calm."

With that, City Year's work in Louisiana was perfectly summed up by a first grader. Each year, thousands of City Year AmeriCorps members – also known as student success coaches – embrace this unique role in 29 communities across America.

The program not only guides countless students toward academic and personal growth but provides young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 access to transferable skills, a living-stipend and an education award. Yet some in Washington are threatening cuts to City Year and other AmeriCorps programs.

It's now on us to make sure students and our communities aren't left behind.

Since its establishment in 2006, thousands of students across New Orleans and Baton Rouge have relied on more than 1,500 AmeriCorps members serving with City Year, a national nonprofit that recruits young adults to serve in systemically under-resourced schools as student success coaches, partnering with teachers to build personal, positive relationships and provide social, emotional, and academic support that helps prepare students with the skills and mindsets to thrive and contribute to their community.

Year after year, City Year places trained and talented AmeriCorps members in high-need Louisiana schools, and the results have been extraordinary: in New Orleans, 20–30% of the City Year AmeriCorps members become teachers after completing their service year, with 67% of them reaching the critical 5-year teaching benchmark, nearly double the city tenure average.

In Baton Rouge students working with an AmeriCorps member demonstrate an average growth of 47% in English and 46% in Math, while 60% improved attendance. Teachers, principals, and leaders such as New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) have taken note of the day-to-day and systemic impact AmeriCorps members have in our community: "New Schools for New Orleans has witnessed the positive impact that City Year has had on the students of our city for nearly 20 years, and we are proud to be partners to their work," says Dana Peterson, Chief Executive Officer of NSNO.

The program's influence extends far beyond tutoring and mentoring at schools, Peterson said. "City Year's AmeriCorps members can be found participating in our community events throughout the city

and a significant percentage of them go on to become teachers in New Orleans after completing their year of service.”

Peterson sees a larger lesson in the work of City Year members. “Their unwavering dedication and tireless commitment to the success of our children, both during and after their service year, serves as a powerful reminder that the transformative power of service to others holds the key to the future of our city.”

Support from Senators Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy and Congressmen Garret Graves and Troy Carter has enabled City Year to change lives, but its future is in jeopardy.

As Congress hashes out next year’s spending priorities, both the House and Senate are pressing forward with bills that would reduce AmeriCorps’ funding. The House bill is especially egregious, slashing AmeriCorps’ budget in half.

It seems that some members of Congress see AmeriCorps as an easy cut, something that can be pared back with little impact. They couldn’t be more wrong.

City Year is more than just a non-profit impacting student and school success. It is an organization fueled by the ingenuity of young adults who serve in our state and while giving back to our community are being mentored, guided and gaining life skills and career development support. They are being prepared to enter the workforce and often remain in our state to help make a difference.

Without continued investment in the national service performed by AmeriCorps members, our country would lose our most effective catalyst for improvement in communities across Louisiana and the nation. Funding AmeriCorps puts our tax dollars to work, returning \$17 in benefits to communities for every federal dollar spent.

A weakened AmeriCorps will have a dramatic impact on City Year’s ability to maintain and grow their corps of student success coaches, whose service and commitment make it possible for those students furthest from opportunity in Louisiana to experience a supportive, welcoming learning environment and realize their academic aspirations and potential.

Congress has a choice to make this fall. AmeriCorps isn’t just a line on a budget sheet; it spurs community impact. It is the City Year service member tutoring a student, so they don’t fall behind; setting up an afterschool activity; or teaching a first grader vowels, words, and reading. While Congress is often looking for spending cuts, AmeriCorps shouldn’t be on the table. We are grateful for Louisiana’s elected officials who have been AmeriCorps champions, but we need more voices.

Voters in Louisiana and across the nation must tell Congress to look elsewhere for savings. Our children’s futures are at stake.

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