

118TH CONGRESS }
2d Session }

SENATE

{ REPORT
118-173

UNITY THROUGH SERVICE ACT OF 2023

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

TO ACCOMPANY

S. 2150

TO ESTABLISH AN INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON SERVICE TO
PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR MILITARY
SERVICE, NATIONAL SERVICE, AND PUBLIC SERVICE FOR
ALL PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES



MAY 9, 2024.—Ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

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Calendar No. 384

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UNITY THROUGH SERVICE ACT OF 2023

MAY 9, 2024.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. PETERS, from the Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 2150]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, to which was referred the bill (S. 2150), to establish an Interagency Council on Service to promote and strengthen opportunities for military service, national service, and public service for all people of the United States, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

CONTENTS

	Page
I. Purpose and Summary	1
II. Background and Need for the Legislation	2
III. Legislative History	4
IV. Section-by-Section Analysis of the Bill, as Reported	5
V. Evaluation of Regulatory Impact	7
VI. Congressional Budget Office Cost Estimate	7
VII. Changes in Existing Law Made by the Bill, as Reported	8

I. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

S. 2150, the *Unity through Service Act of 2023*, would establish an Interagency Council on Service (the Council) to oversee and coordinate initiatives that extend across military, national, and public service. The Council would consult with state, local, tribal, and cross-sector entities about service initiatives and submit a Service Strategy report to the President and Congress every four years, starting two years after the bill's enactment. The bill would also authorize a joint advertising, market research, and recruiting program involving the Department of Defense (DoD), the Corporation

for National and Community Service (CNCS), and the Peace Corps. Additionally, the bill would enhance the information provided to individuals transitioning out of the military or national service programs about other forms of service opportunities. The bill would require the Council to report findings on lessons learned regarding service recruitment and retention and, in coordination with DoD, CNCS, and the Peace Corps, submit a report to Congress every four years with recommendations related to cross-service marketing, research, and promotion. The bill would also direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report to Congress on the effectiveness of the Council and other provisions of this bill.

II. BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE LEGISLATION

The United States has a longstanding tradition of service, including public service, military service, and national service, reflected across communities and in government programs.¹ The *Unity through Service Act of 2023* recognizes the importance of service to our nation in all forms and supports further actions to increase service participation. In his remarks accompanying the introduction of this bill, Senator Jack Reed (D–RI) described the need to promote service, stating, “Americans are ready and willing to answer the call to serve, to come together and meet the challenges that we face at the local, national, and international level. We just need to create the conditions to mobilize them.”²

The *Unity through Service Act* defines public service as employment in federal, state, local, and tribal governments. Over 21 million individuals dedicate their careers to serving the public, including teachers, law enforcement officers, nurses, firefighters, postal workers, and numerous other occupations within the civil service.³ However, the public sector faces significant recruitment and retention challenges. State and local employment rates continue to fall short of staffing levels prior to the COVID–19 public health emergency, despite heightened demands for community services and the need for public professionals to oversee infrastructure upgrades.⁴ Furthermore, public schools struggle to fill a higher number of educator vacancies each year in most states.⁵ At the federal level, 56% of recent graduates said they would not consider employment in the federal government, according to a 2022 survey.⁶ Testimony from the Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget in 2022 noted that only 8% of the federal workforce is under the

¹National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve: The Final Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service* (Mar. 2020).

²Statement of Senator Jack Reed, Congressional Record, S2228 (June 22, 2023).

³U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2022 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates by ownership: Federal, state, and local government, including government-owned schools and hospitals and the U.S. Postal Service (www.bls.gov/oes/current/999001.htm) (accessed Nov. 13, 2023).

⁴*Jobs Sit Empty in the Public Sector, So Unions Pitch In to Recruit*, New York Times (July 27, 2023) (www.nytimes.com/2023/07/27/business/economy/local-government-jobs-unions.html).

⁵Tuan D. Nguyen, Chanh B. Lam, and Paul Bruno, *Is There a National Teacher Shortage? A Systematic Examination of Reports of Teacher Shortages in the United States*, Annenberg Institute at Brown University (Aug. 2022); See also *Teacher Shortages in the United States: A systemic examination of reports of teacher vacancy and shortages* (teachershortages.com/) (accessed Nov. 13, 2023).

⁶Qualtrics, *2022 Federal Study: Improving Early Career Recruitment to Federal Jobs* (Aug. 2022) (success.qualtrics.com/rs/542-FMF-412/images/US%20Federal%20Recruitment%20Report%20_%20Qualtrics.pdf).

age of 30 and 15% of federal employees are eligible for retirement, which will expand to 30% within 5 years.⁷

Military service is another fundamental form of service to the nation. Over 41 million people have served in the United States military throughout the nation’s history.⁸ Currently, over 1.3 million active duty members serve across the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard.⁹ However, the U.S. military faces new and ongoing recruitment challenges. According to the latest annual report on DoD demographics, overall military recruitment decreased by nearly 3% in 2022 compared to 2021.¹⁰ In 2020, DoD reported that 77% of youth ages 17 to 24 would not qualify for service without a waiver based on health and other factors, and nearly half of the remaining 23% would not be available for service due to college enrollment.¹¹ Under Secretary of the Army Gabriel Camarillo also raised the issue of a lack of youth inclination to serve in the military during a March 2023 hearing held by the Senate Committee on Armed Services, noting, “About 75% [of young adults] have little to no knowledge about the Army, and only 9% have the propensity to serve, the lowest it has been in over a decade.”¹²

In addition, volunteers in national service programs play a vital role in fulfilling the needs of their communities. Examples of national service programs include AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, YouthBuild, and the Peace Corps and involve initiatives related to disaster relief, housing, conservation, economic development, and educational opportunities, among other activities to strengthen community resources.¹³ Biennial research conducted by AmeriCorps in coordination with the Census Bureau estimates that over 23.2% of Americans, or 60.7 million individuals, formally volunteered with organizations in 2021, resulting in over 4.1 billion hours of service and over \$120 billion in economic impact. The same research notes that formal participation in national service in 2021 was 7% lower than the 30% participation rate in 2019.¹⁴ During a 2021 congressional hearing, the Chairman of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service made note of a finding that “[n]early a third of millennials state that they are

⁷ House Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on Government Operations, Testimony Submitted for the Record of Deputy Director Jason S. Miller, Office of Management and Budget, *The Future of Federal Work II*, 117th Cong. (July 21, 2022) (H. Hrg. 117–XX).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Those Who Served: America’s Veterans From World War II to the War on Terror* (ACS–43) (June 2020) (www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf).

⁹ U.S. Department of Defense (Defense Manpower Data Center), DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications (dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports) (accessed Nov. 13, 2023).

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Department Report Shows Decline in Armed Forces Population While Percentage of Military Women Rises Slightly* (Nov. 6, 2023).

¹¹ Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020 Qualified Military Available (QMA) Study Key Findings (prod-media.asvabprogram.com/CEP_PDF_Content/Qualified_Military_Available.pdf) (accessed Nov. 13, 2023).

¹² Senate Committee on Armed Services, Testimony Submitted for the Record of Under Secretary Gabriel O. Camarillo, United States Army, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Recruiting Challenges Facing the United States Military*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 22, 2023) (S Hrg. 118–XX).

¹³ National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *supra* note 1, at 9.

¹⁴ AmeriCorps, *Volunteering and Civic Life in America: Research Summary* (Jan. 2023) (<https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/volunteering-civic-life-america-research-summary.pdf>); U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey 2021 Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement* (Jan. 2023).

unaware of existing national service opportunities.”¹⁵ The *Unity through Service Act of 2023* aims to increase awareness about each critical form of service opportunity.

The *Unity through Service Act of 2023* incorporates findings and recommendations from the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service. The *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* established this Commission in part to “consider methods to increase participation in military, national, and public service.”¹⁶ That legislation also directed the Commission to develop recommendations and submit a report to Congress regarding service participation, which the Commission released in March 2020.¹⁷ The report recommended that the federal government establish a dedicated service council to coordinate governmentwide service efforts and take steps to conduct cross-service marketing, recruitment, and retention.¹⁸ The *Unity through Service Act of 2023* would implement the Commission’s recommendations by establishing an Interagency Council on Service and authorizing additional collaborative efforts among military departments, veteran transition assistance programs, national service programs, and public service recruitment efforts to increase participation across each area of service. The bill would result in a whole-of-government Service Strategy and ongoing reporting on initiatives to assess, promote, and coordinate service initiatives. This bill would contribute toward the Commission’s vision that by 2031, five million Americans begin participating in military, national, or public service each year.¹⁹

III. LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Senator Jack Reed (D–RI) introduced S. 2150, the *Unity through Service Act of 2023*, on June 22, 2023, with original cosponsor Senator Todd Young (R–IN). The bill was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

The Committee considered S. 2150 at a business meeting on October 25, 2023. At the business meeting, Chairman Peters offered a substitute amendment to the bill and a modification to the substitute amendment. The substitute amendment adjusted language in the bill related to the Chair of the Interagency Council on Service, clarifying that the individual designated as Chair must already hold a presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed position in the federal government. The modification to the substitute amendment included the following changes to the bill language: (1) striking text regarding the sharing of marketing and recruiting research among Council agencies; (2) adding “faith-based organizations” to the list of entities outside of the federal government with which the Council may consult; (3) clarifying which congressional committees would receive the Council’s quadrennial report on cross-service promotion and requiring the report to include a description of the information and data used to develop relevant initiatives; (4) directing the Council to conduct a study on past advertising campaigns

¹⁵Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing to Examine the Final Recommendations and Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service*, 117th Cong. (Mar. 11, 2021) (S. Hrg. 117–XX).

¹⁶National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. 114–328, Subtitle F.

¹⁷*National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service*, *supra* note 1.

¹⁸*Id.* at 7.

¹⁹*Id.* at 10.

for different areas of service and the role of vaccine requirements on service participation; (5) specifying that the bill does not authorize additional appropriations; and (6) requiring GAO to report to Congress on the effectiveness of the bill. The Committee adopted the modification to the substitute amendment, and the substitute amendment as modified, by unanimous consent, with Senators Peters, Hassan, Sinema, Rosen, Ossoff, Blumenthal, Butler, Paul, Lankford, Romney, Scott, Hawley, and Marshall present. The bill, as amended by the Peters substitute amendment as modified, was ordered reported favorably by roll call vote of 11 yeas to 1 nay, with Senators Peters, Hassan, Sinema, Rosen, Ossoff, Blumenthal, Butler, Lankford, Romney, Scott, and Hawley voting in the affirmative and Senator Paul voting in the negative. Senators Carper and Marshall voted yea by proxy, and Senator Johnson voted nay by proxy, for the record only.

IV. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS OF THE BILL, AS REPORTED

Section 1. Short title

This section establishes the short title of the bill as the “Unity through Service Act of 2023.”

Section 2. Interagency Council on Service

Subsection (a) would establish the Interagency Council on Service, tasked with advising the President on promoting, strengthening, and expanding opportunities for military service, national service, and public service in the United States. The Council would review and coordinate recruitment strategies and federal government initiatives to increase a sense of service and civic responsibility.

Subsection (b) describes the composition of the Council in terms of agency participation and directs the Council to meet on a quarterly basis. The President would designate which member of the Council would serve as Chair, selecting from Council members who hold presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed positions in the federal government.

Subsection (c) outlines the responsibilities of the Council. The Council would develop recruitment strategies to increase participation in military service, national service, and public service. It would provide a forum for the federal officials responsible for military service, national service, and public service programs to coordinate and share best practices for service recruitment. The Council could consult with state, local, and tribal entities, including governments, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector, as well as identify notable initiatives by those entities to improve participation in national service programs. Every four years, starting two years after the bill’s enactment, the Council would submit to the President and Congress a Service Strategy reviewing relevant federal programs and initiatives, online content, and trends for service. The Strategy would recommend opportunities related to service recruitment, joint messaging, and branding.

Section 3. Joint market research to advance military and national service

This section authorizes DoD, CNCS, and the Peace Corps to carry out a joint program for market research, market studies, recruiting, and advertising, to complement existing programs.

Section 4. Transition opportunities for military servicemembers and national service participants

Subsection (a) amends a provision in military law related to employment assistance for servicemembers separating from the military. This subsection would add CNCS as an entity with which DoD and DHS can establish procedures to release the names and other pertinent information of individuals separating from the military and their spouses for the purpose of locating civilian employment and training opportunities.

Subsection (b) amends a provision in military law related to employment assistance, job training assistance, and other transitional services offered to servicemembers separating from the military in a program administered by the Department of Labor. This subsection would require the Department of Labor to provide information to transition counselors about public service opportunities, training on public service job recruitment, and the advantages of careers with the federal government. It would also add an option for program participants to receive two days of instruction on national and community service.

Subsection (c) amends federal statute that outlines the duties of the CEO of CNCS. It would add the duty of ensuring individuals completing terms of service in domestic volunteer programs, such as AmeriCorps, receive information about military and public service opportunities.

Section 5. Joint report to congress on initiatives to integrate military and national service

This section requires that every four years, the Chair of the Council, in coordination with DoD, CNCS, and the Peace Corps, submit a report to relevant congressional committees regarding cross-service marketing, research, and promotion. The report would include the number of individuals serving in national service programs who previously served in the military and vice versa. It would also include assessments and recommendations related to joint advertising and recruitment initiatives, as well as a description of the information and data used to develop related initiatives or campaigns.

Section 6. Reports to Congress on lessons learned regarding retention and recruitment

This section would require the Chair of the Council to conduct a study on the effectiveness of past advertising campaigns for each area of service, as well as a study on the role of vaccine requirements on service retention and recruitment. The Council would submit a report on the findings of study to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Homeland Security within 270 days after the bill's enactment.

Section 7. Definitions

This section defines the terms “Interagency Council on Service,” “military department,” “military service,” “national service,” “public service,” “service,” and “State Service Commission” for the purpose of this bill.

Section 8. No Additional funds

This section specifies that the bill does not authorize the appropriation of additional funding for carrying out the bill’s provisions.

Section 9. GAO report

This section directs GAO to report to Congress on the effectiveness of the provisions in this bill within 30 months after the bill’s enactment.

V. EVALUATION OF REGULATORY IMPACT

Pursuant to the requirements of paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee has considered the regulatory impact of this bill and determined that the bill will have no regulatory impact within the meaning of the rules. The Committee agrees with the Congressional Budget Office’s statement that the bill contains no intergovernmental or private sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

VI. CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

S. 2150, Unity Through Service Act of 2023			
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on October 25, 2023			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2024	2024-2028	2024-2033
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	0
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	*	3	not estimated
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2034?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	No
		Mandate Effects	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2034?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No
* = between zero and \$500,000.			

S. 2150 would establish the Interagency Council on Service which would be composed of representatives from at least 16 federal agencies. The Council would coordinate efforts by those agencies aimed at increasing public awareness of opportunities for service in the military, civilian employment in federal, state, local, and tribal governments, and other opportunities for service that meets the needs of communities, states, and the nation. The Council

would be required to produce a report on the effectiveness of previous advertising efforts to increase public service and on the effect of vaccine requirements on recruiting and retention.

The bill also would authorize the Department of Defense, the Peace Corps, and the Corporation for National and Community Service to conduct a joint recruitment and advertising campaign. The bill would require the Council to quadrennially submit implementation reports to the Congress and issue recommendations for increasing interagency marketing and promotion initiatives.

S. 2150 also would require the Government Accountability Office to report on the effectiveness of the legislation within 30 months of enactment.

Using information about the cost of similar entities, CBO estimates that implementing S. 2150 would cost \$2 million over the 2024–2028 period for compensation, travel, activities, and other administrative expenses of the Council’s staff. CBO estimates that satisfying the bill’s other reporting and research requirements would cost an additional \$1 million over the same timeframe. In total, implementing the bill would cost \$3 million over the 2024–2028 period. Any spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Christopher Mann. The estimate was reviewed by Christina Hawley Anthony, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director, Congressional Budget Office.

VII. CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in brackets, new matter is printed in italic, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

UNITED STATES CODE

* * * * *

TITLE 10—ARMED FORCES

* * * * *

SUBTITLE A—GENERAL MILITARY LAW

* * * * *

PART II—PERSONNEL

* * * * *

CHAPTER 58—BENEFITS AND SERVICES FOR MEMBERS BEING SEPARATED OR RECENTLY SEPARATED

* * * * *

SEC. 1143. EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

- (a) * * *
- (b) * * *

(c) INFORMATION TO CIVILIAN ENTITIES.—

(1) For the purpose of assisting members covered by subsection (a) and their spouses in locating civilian employment and training opportunities, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall establish and implement procedures to release to civilian employers, organizations, State employment agencies, *the Corporation for National and Community Service*, and other appropriate entities the names (and other pertinent information) of such members and their spouses. Such names may be released for such purpose only with the consent of such members and spouses.

* * * * *

SEC. 1144. EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE, JOB TRAINING ASSISTANCE, AND OTHER TRANSITIONAL SERVICES: DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

- (a) * * *

(b) ELEMENTS OF PROGRAM.—In establishing and carrying out a program under this section, the Secretary of Labor shall do the following:

- (1) * * *

* * * * *

(11) *Provide information on public service opportunities, training on public service job recruiting, and the advantages of careers with the Federal Government.*

* * * * *

(f) PROGRAM CONTENTS.—

(1) The program carried out under this section shall consist of instruction as follows:

- (A) * * *

* * * * *

(D) Two days of instruction regarding a topic selected by the member from the following subjects:

- (i) Preparation for employment.
- (ii) Preparation for education.
- (iii) Preparation for vocational training.
- (iv) Preparation for entrepreneurship.

(v) *National and community service, taught in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service.*

(~~v~~vi) Other options determined by the Secretary concerned.

* * * * *

**NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE
ACT OF 1990**

* * * * *

**TITLE I—NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY
SERVICE STATE GRANT PROGRAM**

* * * * *

PART III—NATIONAL SERVICE PARTICIPANTS

* * * * *

**SUBTITLE G—CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL
AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

* * * * *

**SEC. 193A. AUTHORITIES AND DUTIES OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF-
FICER.**

(a) * * *

(b) DUTIES.—In addition to the duties conferred on the Chief Ex-
ecutive Officer under any other provision of the national service
laws, the Chief Executive Officer, in collaboration with the State
Commissions, shall—

(1) * * *

* * * * *

(24) conduct outreach to ensure the inclusion of economically
disadvantaged individuals in national service programs and ac-
tivities authorized under the national service laws; **[and]**

(25) ensure that outreach, awareness, and recruitment ef-
forts are consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act of
1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) and section 504 of the Rehabili-
tation Act of 1973~~].~~; *and*

(26) *ensure that individuals completing a partial or full term
of service in a program under subtitle C or E or part A of title
I of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (42 U.S.C. 4951
et seq.) receive information about military and public service
opportunities for which they may qualify or in which they may
be interested.*

* * * * *

