

Remarks on the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act  
By David Moren  
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Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the Older Americans Act reauthorization listening sessions.

My name is David Moren and I am the Director of Experience Corps Oakland, a program of Aspiranet, which is the host agency for Experience Corps in the Bay Area. Experience Corps is a national organization that mobilizes the time and skills of older Americans to tutor and mentor elementary school children for academic success. After nearly 15 years, 2000 Experience Corps members serve over 20,000 students in 22 cities across the country. Multiple studies have proven the significant and positive benefits of the program for the students, the schools and the older adult members. I have attached several of the studies to my written remarks. Aspiranet, a statewide agency, is proud to be part of a successful national effort that changes the way society and older people themselves regard the years following retirement. Ultimately, we would like to expand Experience Corps throughout the state, to all communities where low-income children are struggling in school.

Experience Corps Bay Area (ECBA) is in three cities, San Francisco, Oakland and San Rafael, with over 200 members who range in age from 55 to 94 and come from all walks of life. Since 1999, we have been developing our methods for service delivery following the program design of founders Marc Freedman and John Gardner. As a result, we have strong teams and leaders, in 22 schools throughout the Bay Area, as well as several community partners, including Alameda County's Area Agency on Aging and Oakland's Commission on Aging, which are here with us today.

One of our veteran members, Lucy Scott, once said, "Being an Experience Corps member is such a wonderfully reciprocal relationship – I get to stay active and give so much to the kids, and they in return give so much back to me". Quotes like these are heard often from so many of our members. Like Lucy, they tutor and mentor struggling students on a consistent basis throughout the year under the direction of the teachers. The schools we serve are also some of the neediest urban schools with some of society's most vulnerable – low-income, English Language Learners or high racial minorities. These are the kids that often need the most support.

Prior to the last reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, we were an enthusiastic participant in the efforts of the national office of Experience Corps to bring about a new legislative focus on creating outcome-oriented opportunities for civic engagement. We were pleased to see that such provisions were added to the authority of the Administration on Aging. We recommend that the reauthorization include thoughtful changes to bolster the weight and impact of the current authority in both financial and non-financial ways:

First, *Section 202(c): Duties and Functions of the Assistant Secretary*, laid out new responsibility for the Assistant Secretary to encourage civic engagement to the maximum extent feasible, and develop a comprehensive strategy for utilizing older individuals in meeting critical local needs with assistance from organizations like Experience Corps and Aspiranet.

We applaud Assistant Secretary Greenlee for indicating that civic engagement will indeed be a focus for her administration. Just last week Deputy Assistant Secretary Cindy Padilla and other AoA officials, including David Ishida Regional Administrator of AoA for the West Coast region, met with over 50 Experience Corps members in Baltimore. Attention to civic engagement opportunities can have a direct impact on the health and well-being of older Americans. Research by Johns Hopkins University Center on Aging and Health has reported that members of Experience Corps Baltimore make significant health gains, including improved strength, cognitive and executive functions and social connections. Experience Corps members say all the time, “Now I have a good reason to get up in the morning.” (Not many of us say that about getting on the exercise bike!) It would be wonderful if older adults everywhere had such a good reason to get up.

We recommend that the Older Americans Act reauthorization further strengthen the role and specific actions of the Assistant Secretary through interagency planning and collaboration to further civic engagement goals.

Second, *Section 417, Demonstration, Support and Research Projects for Multigenerational and Civic Engagement Activities*, created a new competitive grant program for organizations to carry out innovative demonstration projects that provide opportunities for older individuals to participate in activities that utilize their time and range of skill to meet community needs. Since the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006 went into effect, both Congress and the Assistant Secretary have taken steps to fulfill these requirements, despite the difficult economic times.

We suggest authorizing a specific dollar amount, \$10 million per year, for Section 417's demonstration grants. Achieving this funding level would enable so many more organizations to benefit from the good work already being done to promote civic engagement among older Americans.

I close with deep appreciation for your solicitation of citizen input at this stage of planning for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. We would be pleased to be of assistance as you go further in developing the Administration on Aging's positions on this important legislation.

Thank you very much.