

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader, House of Representatives
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader, United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

September 15, 2021

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer and Leader McCarthy:

ReImagine Appalachia is a coalition advancing a sustainable economic vision for a 21st century Appalachia—one that is good for working people, communities, the environment and our health. ReImagine Appalachia’s vision builds on the region’s assets while understanding that vision can’t be achieved without significant public investment, strong policies, and responsible economic development approaches designed to maximize the benefit to the community as a whole. As a coalition, we are outlining below the important factors of a new Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) that must be included in legislation that would institute this revived program. Senator Bob Casey has introduced S.2414 “Revive the CCC Act” and Representative Conor Lamb has introduced H.R. 5191 which ReImagine Appalachia believes addresses most of the important factors we have outlined below.

The CCC was a work relief program created as part of the New Deal in 1933 by former President, Franklin D. Roosevelt. A modern CCC could play a vital role providing family sustaining employment capitalizing on the potential in our region for regenerative agriculture, reforestation, wetland restoration, urban tree canopies and green space, and other carbon-absorbing natural infrastructure investments.

Studies have shown that revitalizing and updating the CCC into a modern-day employment, job training and conservation program could employ tens of thousands of people in the Appalachian region alone. The Political Economy Research Institute found through a job study that this program could create 53,070 jobs in Pennsylvania, 11,612 jobs in West Virginia and 50,900 jobs in Ohio. Not only would a new CCC create jobs in the Appalachian region, but if it is crafted

correctly, it could be an important source of living wage jobs and as apprenticeship prep training building pathways towards family sustaining careers for underserved communities by prioritizing employment to black and indigenous people of color, low-income workers, rural workers and returning citizens. These jobs and pathways to apprenticeship are especially needed in the Ohio River Valley states, where many prime age men (25 to 54 years old) are no longer part of the formal job market, in part because of the loss of good jobs for non-college men.

We are supportive of Senator Casey's CCC bill, which, among other things, would create a re-entry program for returning citizens caught up in the so-called "war on drugs" and opioid epidemic, which has hit Appalachia particularly hard. And we are enthusiastic that committee leadership in both the House and Senate have signaled that a CCC will be included in a reconciliation package. As that legislation moves forward, and as a revised CCC becomes a reality and starts to be implemented, ReImagine Appalachia wants to ensure inclusion of the following priorities:

- A minimum wage of at least \$15/hour is needed to ensure CCC jobs pay enough to support people and families so they can meet basic needs and so corps jobs can attract people from all backgrounds. This should also include funding or stipends for health care insurance coverage and childcare expenses.
- Formerly incarcerated people face many significant barriers to employment. A new CCC program should include a targeted effort to employ returning citizens and those in drug related recovery programs. The program should not have wide exclusions based on criminal convictions, but should help those who face difficulty accessing jobs and job training.
- The revived CCC should be considered a pre-apprenticeship program directed towards union apprenticeship. Underserved populations must be targeted for employment, with half the workforce coming from high-poverty census tracts.
- Assistance should be provided to farmers and owners of woodlands to adopt healthier, carbon-absorbing land management practices.
- CCC funding allocations should be designed to help repair damage from last century of extractive industry practices and prioritize census tracts with shuttered power plants, abandoned mine lands, former steel and large industrial facilities, as well as areas of persistent poverty.
- It is imperative that non-college educated people – which have much higher unemployment and underemployment rates – make up the bulk of CCC members. This could include requiring that a percentage of all corps members not have a bachelor's degree or higher (in conjunction with the targeted hire percentage for underserved populations).
- A public works option should be included that directly hires CCC members as federal employees to work on public infrastructure projects that are financed, constructed, and owned by the public.

These factors are critically important to ensure that the revitalization of the CCC is successful in addressing both the employment and the climate crisis. We must ensure that the new CCC supports communities most at risk and workers previously left behind, through the key tenets listed above, or it will fail in its much-needed ambitions.

A modern CCC has the ability to create thousands of jobs while helping the region adapt to global energy market shifts and respond to the climate crisis. To maximize the benefit of a revived CCC, the many low-income communities of the Appalachian region must receive their fair share in funds and resources. If carefully crafted with the leadership and wisdom of the communities and industries most impacted, the new CCC could be an incredible opportunity for our economy and environment to thrive.

Signed,

ReImagine Appalachia Executive Committee, on behalf of the ReImagine Appalachia coalition:

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