



## **The Building Civic Bridges Act** *Senators Chris Coons (DE) and Ben Sasse (NE)*

*Addresses polarization and division in the United States by expanding research on, deepening skills for, and supporting programs that engage in civic bridgebuilding*

**Background:** Polarization and division in the United States have reached such a point that they threaten our strength both domestically and overseas. A healthy and religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse democracy relies on everyday citizens to live, work, and serve alongside people who see the world very differently than they do. The Bipartisan Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship recently suggested expanding civic bridgebuilding capacity to address toxic polarization at its source. Creating and maintaining solid, lasting person-to-person relationships across differences and reframing our sense of common purpose is the key to moving forward.

Recent years have seen significant growth in local innovations in civic bridgebuilding—a field comprised of local leaders, dedicated nonprofits, coalitions, and invested philanthropic partners. Recognizing the value of these varied grassroots initiatives, the *Building Civic Bridges Act* would create a pilot program at AmeriCorps, the federal government’s agency for service and civic engagement, to support that work.

### **Legislation:**

- Establishes a new Office of Civic Bridgebuilding within the AmeriCorps agency.
- Establishes a new grant program for civic bridgebuilding programs, funds from which would be awarded on a competitive basis.
  - Eligible organizations would include nonprofits, public institutions, schools, and faith-based organizations that work on in these areas.
  - Proposed initiatives would be required to:
    - Cite a research base supporting the proposed activities;
    - Provide evidence of engaging diverse communities;
    - Ensure the safety of all participants;
    - Explicitly focus on bridging divides through community-based projects, relationship building, or addressing the root causes of polarization; and
    - Report project outcomes.
- Supports the training of AmeriCorps members in civic bridgebuilding skills and techniques, thereby expanding the impact through the more than 300,000 Americans serving through the agency’s programs each year.
- Supports research on civic bridgebuilding, civic engagement, and social cohesion.
- Requires a GAO report summarizing and assessing the effectiveness of the bill’s activities.
- Authorizes \$25 million annually for these activities.

**Endorsements:** Interfaith America, Association of American Universities, Service Year Alliance, among others.

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