



October 31, 2022

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 201515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 201515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Scott and Murray and Ranking Members Foxx and Burr,

On behalf of the undersigned associations, I write to urge you to pass the bipartisan Building Civic Bridges Act (H.R. 6843/S. 4530) before the end of the 117th Congress. We strongly support this bipartisan legislation to deepen civic engagement. Fostering civic engagement across deep divides – no matter whether the divides are religious, racial, economic, or partisan – is paramount if we wish to protect our democracy at a time of intense polarization.

There is an urgent need to expand and enhance efforts to preserve our republic's democratic values. Ideological polarization and partisan hostility are at historic levels, as the majority of Americans now have a "very unfavorable" view of people in the other party.¹ These divisions will only continue to worsen over time if we do not address them now. Civic dialogue is crucial to the fabric of our democracy. Across the country, our nation's colleges and universities bring together people from diverse backgrounds and are often flashpoints for deep and partisan disagreements. We know the importance of bridging divides and seek to foster the kinds of civic engagement and participation that are essential to sustaining our country's democratic traditions. Engaging with a wide range of people has the potential to increase sensitivity to differences in perspective and improve our ability to function in a heterogeneous community,² and this is exactly what the Building Civic Bridges Act would do.

The legislation would create an office of Civic Bridgebuilding that would provide competitive grants to civic bridgebuilding programs across the country and track their success, train AmeriCorps members in bridgebuilding skills, and serve as a public coordinator and

¹ [Partisan Hostility Grows Amid Signs of Frustration With Two-Party System | Pew Research Center](#)

² Cramer Walsh, K. (2007). "The democratic potential of civic dialogue." *Deliberation, Participation, and Democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

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convener for the larger national civic bridgebuilding movement. The bill sets up a rigorous, evidence-based, peer-reviewed grant application process for applicants like community nonprofits, universities, civic clubs, and religious organizations to follow. The Building Civic Bridges Act would also fund research on civic bridgebuilding and social cohesion.

Strengthening civic bridgebuilding in communities across the country is vital to fostering constructive political discourse that advances our nation's democratic values and national interests. The Building Civic Bridges Act represents a meaningful step to addressing these problems in a bipartisan way, and we look forward to working with you to advance this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

Achieving the Dream
ACPA-College Student Educators International
American Association of Colleges and Universities
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American College Health Association (ACHA)
American Council on Education
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Campus Compact
Career Education Colleges and Universities
CCCU - Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Common App
Council of Graduate Schools
Council on Social Work Education
EDUCAUSE
ETS
HACU
LEAD California
NAFSA: Association of International Educators

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NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Phi Beta Kappa Society

State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

The National Association of College and University Business Officers