H. R. 118TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION

To amend the National and Community Service Act of 1990 to establish an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding within the Corporation for National and Community Service, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Kilmer introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on ____________________

A BILL

To amend the National and Community Service Act of 1990 to establish an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding within the Corporation for National and Community Service, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Building Civic Bridges Act.”
SEC. 2. CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING.

Subtitle H of title I of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12653 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“PART VI—CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING

“SEC. 198T. OFFICE OF CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING.

“(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There shall be in the Corporation an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding (in this section referred to as the ‘Office’). The Office shall be headed by an Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding, who shall be designated by the Chief Executive Officer pursuant to section 195(b).

“(b) DUTIES.—The Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding shall carry out each of the following:

“(1) Administer the grant program described in subsection (d) to support civic bridgebuilding across the United States, including by establishing standardized criteria (based on principles of scientific research and input through the consultation process under subsection (c)) to track the effectiveness of projects and activities funded under such program.

“(2) Support the Corporation in providing training in skills and techniques relevant to civic bridgebuilding (based on principles of scientific research and input through the consultation process under subsection (c))—
“(A) for participants (including individuals who have been selected to be participants) of a program receiving funding under the authority of the national service laws; and

“(B) upon request by an organization that receives funding under the authority of the national service laws or that is carrying out a program in which participants described in subparagraph (A) are participating, for such organization.

“(3) Support research and evaluations on civic bridgebuilding and the dissemination of related information, including through—

“(A) evaluation and oversight of the grant program described in subsection (d);

“(B) as the Corporation determines necessary, collaboration (including through the evaluation of the activities of the Corporation relating to civic bridgebuilding and civic engagement) between the Office and—

“(i) other offices (such as the Office of Research and Evaluation), teams, or individuals within the Corporation; and

“(ii) other Federal agencies, including the Community Relations Service of the
Department of Justice, the United States Agency for International Development, and the United States Institute of Peace; and

“(C) the establishment of a publicly-available collection of publications for a research base for the purpose assembling research focused on evaluating the extent to which civic bridgebuilding and civic engagement activities strengthen or weaken other civic bridgebuilding and civic engagement activities and outcomes in the United States.

“(4) Activate and sustain a public conversation about the importance of civic bridgebuilding by convening and coordinating civic bridgebuilding programs and providing resources, networking, and collaboration opportunities to individuals and entities in the civic bridgebuilding field for the purpose of disseminating and refining best practices based on principles of scientific research and input through the consultation process under subsection (c).

“(c) CONSULTATION PROCESS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the duties under this section, the Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding shall consult with members of the civic bridgebuilding field, including for purposes of—
“(A) identifying strategic priorities for the Office;

“(B) developing the standardized criteria required under subsection (b)(1);

“(C) supporting the development and dissemination of research under subsection (b)(3);

“(D) developing best practices for civic bridgebuilding under subsection (b)(4); and

“(E) administering the grant program described in subsection (d).

“(2) DIVERSITY IN CONSULTATION.—In carrying out the consultation under paragraph (1), the Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding shall consult members of the civic bridgebuilding field who represent diverse ideological, religious, racial, regional, professional, or ethnic communities, including such members—

“(A) who represent eligible entities engaged in civic bridgebuilding;

“(B) who represent existing or potential programs and grantees receiving funding under the authority of the national service laws, including State Service Commissions;

“(C) who are researchers producing work based on principles of scientific research related
to civic bridgebuilding in the United States and internationally; and

“(D) who represent other Federal agencies or public institutions engaged in or supporting work related to civic bridgebuilding in the United States and internationally, such as—

“(i) the Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice;

“(ii) the United States Agency for International Development; and

“(iii) the United States Institute of Peace.

“(d) CIVIC BRIDGBUILDING PILOT GRANT PROGRAM.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—From the amounts appropriated to carry out this subsection, the Corporation (acting through the Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding with input through the consultation process under subsection (c))—

“(A) shall carry out a pilot program for a 3-year period to award grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible entities to support civic bridgebuilding programs across the United States for purposes of—
“(i) reducing conflict and improving social cohesion; and

“(ii) addressing a public concern such as unmet human, educational, health care, environmental, or public safety needs; and

“(B) may carry out such a pilot program for additional 3-year periods.

“(2) GRANT PERIOD.—A grant awarded under this subsection shall be for a 1-year period. Grants shall be awarded under this subsection in 3 grant cycles for each 3-year period of the pilot program carried out under paragraph (1).

“(3) APPLICATION.—To be eligible to receive a grant under this subsection, an eligible entity shall submit an application to the Corporation at such time, in such manner, and containing such information and assurances as the Corporation may require, including—

“(A) a description of the project that will be funded with the grant;

“(B) an explanation of how that such project will—

“(i) engage communities across lines of polarization;
“(ii) facilitate the establishment or continuation of civic bridgebuilding and social cohesion, which may include addressing the root causes of polarization and conflict as described in the publicly-available collection of publications for a research base established under subsection (b)(3)(C);

“(iii) reflect research supporting the efficacy and impact of the proposed approach for the project; and

“(iv) ensure physical, social, and psychological wellbeing and safety for all participants involved in the project, including for such participants from historically marginalized communities;

“(C) a description of best practices grounded in principles of scientific research for how such safety will be achieved; and

“(D) an assurance that the eligible entity will report outcomes of such project to track effectiveness based on standardized criteria established by the Office of Civic Bridgebuilding under subsection (b)(1).
“(4) USES OF FUNDS.—An eligible entity receiving a grant under this subsection shall use the grant funds to carry out a project to advance civic bridgebuilding in communities across the United States.

“(e) COMPTROLLER GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall, not later than 18 months after the end of the 3-year period of the program carried out under subsection (d)(1)(A) and, as applicable, not later than 18 months after each 3-year period of the program carried out under subsection (d)(1)(B), submit to Congress a report, which summarizes and assesses the effectiveness and impact of the activities carried out under grants awarded under subsection (d).

“(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING.—The term ‘civic bridgebuilding’—

“(A) means an activity, grounded in principles of scientific research, that—

“(i) fosters respect between diverse communities;

“(ii) supports social cohesion and diminishes polarization;

“(iii) forges a sense of common civic purpose; and
“(iv) seeks to address a public concern such as unmet human, educational, health care, environmental, or public safety needs; and

“(B) includes—

“(i) activities that take place in local communities, where individuals and institutions come together to build empathy and social cohesion, strengthen belonging, and address local issues; and

“(ii) activities at the field level, where civic bridgebuilding leaders work together to share research and best practices, learn from one another, and grow other civic bridgebuilding.

“(2) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING FIELD.—The term ‘civic bridgebuilding field’ means—

“(A) the programs, leaders, and community groups involved in civic bridgebuilding activities;

“(B) researchers producing work based on principles of scientific research related to civic bridgebuilding in the United States and abroad; and
“(C) Federal agencies and public institutions engaged in or supporting work related to civic bridgebuilding in the United States and internationally.

“(3) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING LEADER.—The term ‘civic bridgebuilding leader’ means an individual who leads civic bridgebuilding programs or efforts.

“(4) CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.—The term ‘civic engagement’ means an individual or collective action designed to address a public concern such as an unmet human, educational, health care, environmental, or public safety need.

“(5) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term ‘eligible entity’ means a nonprofit entity, community- or faith-based organization, institution of higher education (as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a))), public institution, or consortium of any such entities.

“(6) PUBLIC INSTITUTION.—The term ‘public institution’ means a library or unit of State, local, or special purpose government.

“(7) RESEARCH BASE.—The term ‘research base’ means any publications that contain observations, analysis, and conclusions based on principles
of scientific research with respect to the challenges of political and social polarization in the United States, and practical approaches to strengthen social cohesion, foster a sense of national connection, or improve intergroup relations in divided communities.

“(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section $25,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2027.”.

SEC. 3. TABLE OF CONTENTS.

The table of contents in section 1(b) of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 is amended by inserting at the end of the item relating to subtitle H of title I, the following:

“PART VI—CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING

“Sec. 198T. Office of Civic Bridgebuilding.”.