

# THE BUILDING CIVIC BRIDGES ACT (BCBA)

## Addressing Polarization and Division in the United States

Polarization and division in the United States have reached such a point that it threatens our strength domestically and overseas. According to an NBC News [poll](#) conducted in January 2022, 70 percent of Americans agree with the statement *that “America has become so polarized that it can no longer solve the major issues facing the country”* – up from 45 percent in 2010. That same poll showed that 76 percent of Americans — including 7 in 10 Democrats, Republicans, and Independents — *“believe there is a threat to democracy and majority rule in this country.”*

A healthy religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse democracy relies on everyday citizens to live, work, and serve alongside people who believe very differently than they do; reframing our sense of common purpose is the key to moving forward.

This century has seen significant growth in local innovations in civic bridgebuilding—a movement comprised of local leaders, dedicated nonprofits, coalitions, and invested philanthropic partners—which has grown in strength and dedicated collective efforts to address our national polarization. Federal support for efforts to reduce polarization and engage communities in civic bridgebuilding would support this work as a key national priority. In fact, a recent [report](#) from the Bipartisan Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship points out that the U.S. government spends tens of millions of dollars through the National Endowment for Democracy trying to foster social cohesion and support civic bridgebuilding in other countries to strengthen democracy abroad — yet it does none of that work here in the United States.

## A Bill to Support Community Civic Bridgebuilding to Heal Divides

The bill would establish a non-partisan pilot program, led by an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding, within AmeriCorps focused on four core pillars:

- Administering a competitive grant program to support civic bridgebuilding programs across the nation. Funding will primarily focus on supporting organizations and spaces striving to heal toxic polarization in the United States through civic bridgebuilding efforts;
- Supporting the training of AmeriCorps members in civic bridgebuilding skills and techniques;
- Supporting academic research on civic bridgebuilding, civic engagement, and social cohesion; and
- Activating a public conversation about the importance of civic bridgebuilding by serving a key role as both a convening and coordinating partner to the national civic bridgebuilding movement.

This bill will promote the ability of local communities to tackle sources of division while empowering participants and organizations with a foundation on which they can address contentious issues and ultimately, bridge divides.

**Endorsing Organizations:** *America’s Service Commissions; American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU); American Council on Education; American Leadership Forum of Silicon Valley; Association of American Universities (AAU); Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU); Bates Technical College; Business for America; Business Roundtable; Campus Compact; Catholic Charities USA; Civility First; CoGenerate; Community 2.0; Constructive Dialogue Institute; Council for Christian Colleges and Universities; Divided We Fall; Fix Democracy First; Friends Committee on National Legislation; Future Caucus; Habitat for Humanity; Interfaith America; Lead for America; Listen First Project; More Perfect; Mormon Women for Ethical Government; Move for America; Multi-Faith Neighbors Network (MFNN) and Glocal Net; National Association of Counties (NACo); National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU); National League of Cities; Nonprofit Association of Washington; Peace through Action USA; PEN America; Resolutionaries; Service Year Alliance; State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO); Tacoma Community College; Tacoma Urban League; Team Democracy; Third Way; U.S. Chamber of Commerce; University of Washington – Tacoma; Urban Rural Action; Voices for National Service; With Honor; YMCA of Pierce-Kitsap County; YMCA of the USA; YouthBuild; YVote/Next Generation Politics*