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Justice Department and CNCS Announce New Partnership to Enhance Immigration Courts and Provide Critical Legal Assistance to Unaccompanied Minors

WASHINGTON - The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which administers AmeriCorps, and the Department of Justice today announced "justice AmeriCorps," a strategic partnership to increase national service opportunities while enhancing the effective and efficient adjudication of immigration proceedings involving certain children who have crossed the U.S. Border without a parent or legal guardian.

The interagency agreement reflects the spirit of a Presidential Memorandum issued on July 15, 2013 that established the Task Force on Expanding National Service. The Task Force calls on federal agency leaders to identify ways to address some of the nation's most pressing challenges by expanding national service.

"With the launch of justice AmeriCorps, we're taking a historic step to strengthen our justice system and protect the rights of the most vulnerable members of society," said Attorney General Eric Holder. "How we treat those in need, particularly young people who must appear in immigration proceedings - many of whom are fleeing violence, persecution, abuse, or trafficking - goes to the core of who we are as a nation. Through this program, we reaffirm our allegiance to the values that have always shaped our pursuit of justice. We empower new generations of aspiring attorneys and paralegals to serve their country and stand on the front lines of this fight. And we bolster both the efficacy and the efficiency of our immigration courts."

"Young immigrant children entering the U.S., often under dangerous circumstances, represent some of the most vulnerable individuals who interact with our immigration system," said Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service. "AmeriCorps members will provide critical support for these children, many of whom are escaping abuse, persecution, or violence. The justice AmeriCorps partnership responds to a direct call from Congress, and reflects how national service can be a part of the solution to some of the most challenging issues facing our country today."

The partnership, known as "justice AmeriCorps," is a grant program that will enroll approximately 100 lawyers and paralegals as AmeriCorps members to provide legal services to the most vulnerable of these children, responding to Congress' direction to DOJ's Executive Office for Immigration Review "to better serve vulnerable populations such as children and improve court efficiency through pilot efforts aimed at improving legal representation." In addition, DOJ officials believe the AmeriCorps members will help identify unaccompanied immigrant children who have been victims of human trafficking or abuse to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those who perpetrate such crimes on those children.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, Social Innovation Fund, and other programs, and leads President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For more information, visit nationalservice.gov.

The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) is an agency within the Department of Justice. Under delegated authority from the Attorney General, immigration judges and the Board of Immigration Appeals interpret and adjudicate immigration cases according to United States immigration laws. EOIR's immigration judges conduct administrative court proceedings in immigration courts located throughout the nation. They determine whether foreign-born individuals—whom the Department of Homeland Security charges with violating immigration law—should be ordered removed from the United States or should be granted relief from removal and be permitted to remain in this country. The Board of Immigration Appeals primarily reviews appeals of decisions by immigration judges. EOIR's Office of the Chief Administrative Hearing Officer adjudicates immigration-related employment cases. EOIR is committed to ensuring fairness in all of the cases it adjudicates.