

Written Testimony of

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Thank you, Chairmen and Committee Members, for inviting me here today to speak in support of national service and to talk specifically about how HealthCorps is promoting and inspiring service in the field of wellness. I am deeply indebted to Senator Mikulski for reaching out to our founder, heart surgeon and Oprah Show Health Expert Dr. Mehmet Oz, with her kind invitation less than two weeks ago to join the conversation on integrative medicine and how it can address the rise in chronic illnesses in at risk communities. That conversation led to my participation today. I have offered Dr. Oz's Senate HELP Committee testimony as Appendix I. As a member of the ServiceNation Leadership Council, Dr. Oz leads the health service initiative and joins many other national and cultural leaders and celebrities who endorse national service throughout the United States.

WHO WE ARE

HealthCorps was started five years ago in an effort to save our children who are destined for shorter life spans than those of their parents if we don't take immediate action.

HealthCorps' mandate is the promotion of integrated wellness – eating smart, staying active, thinking positive - to students and communities across the country at the grass roots level. We view HealthCorps as more of a movement than a program because we empower and provide opportunities for future practitioners, teenagers, teachers and school administrators to devote time to changing the health of America. At this time more than ever, service can not only serve as an agent of change, it can serve as a powerful tool for mental resilience. When I was a kid growing up and times got tough, my East Texas Mother would say, "Lose yourself in a cause greater than yourself." And it works. People are happier when they focus on others.

HealthCorps' heart is its team of Coordinators, recent college graduates, who give two years of service as salaried health coaches and peer-mentors to high school students in 44 schools across seven states. These passionate, bright young people are destined for careers in medicine, nursing and health policy. They could go straight on to their graduate degrees – but instead choose first to cut their teeth in the front lines of high schools - impacting young lives.

WHAT WE DO

Fashioned after a Peace Corps model, HealthCorps deploys each Coordinator to a specific school where he or she works five days a week with the principal and faculty to integrate our curriculum and after-school activities into the traditional scholastic program. These Coordinators go far beyond the job description and call of duty, however. Many spend extra hours tutoring their students in academics and helping them with college or job applications. They coach sports teams and run after school clubs. They

become an accessible and trusted resource to the kids. HealthCorps' unique activism model works because kids influence kids best.

In classrooms, Coordinators use personal anecdotes, fun activities and current events to drive home our message – value your body – it's the most important thing you'll ever inherit. And spread the word. Each school year we reach approximately 500 students through our in-school seminars and extracurricular activities - such as cooking clubs, expert guest speakers, pedometer competitions and yoga classes.

HealthCorps is not just about our Coordinators doing service. It is about inspiring the HealthCorps students to do service learning as well – by participating in and organizing community wellness events. And by going out and spreading the word to younger kids and senior citizens. At Lehman High School in the Bronx, Coordinator Luke Martin takes his HealthCorps Students to Hunts Point Middle School to teach the younger kids stretching and cooking lessons that they have learned through HealthCorps. We even expect them to audit their refrigerators at home, taking the health conversation into families all over America.

Through a partnership with USA Mentoring, founded by former New York First Lady Matilda Cuomo, we will be mobilizing volunteers of all ages to do one-on-one health coaching in our high schools as an extra support for our mandate.

Through community and school wide events, the program influences another 1000 administrators, family members or friends. Our Coordinators and HealthCorps students organize community health fairs, step contests, Professional Development Nights, Parents Nights and more. In three boroughs in New York City and at Brown Stadium in Cleveland, Ohio, on Saturday, May 30th, approximately 10,000 people will participate in our “Highway to Health” Fairs.

WHAT WE DO WORKS

We know what we are doing is working. Our first efficacy study, which will be presented to an international conference this June, shows we significantly decreased students' consumption of soda and significantly increased their physical activity. As Dr. Andrew Weil's testimony on February 26th pointed out, soda will prove to be the number one culprit in the childhood obesity crisis and subsequent epidemic of Type II diabetes. Our most popular seminar shows students the actual amount of sugar that they are drinking in one can of soda and asks them whether they would eat it in its solid form.

We've also know we are expanding the conversation from campuses to communities. In Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, the pedometers handed out through HealthCorps to the high school students created a “pedometer craze” in the entire town.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

Demand for the HealthCorps program outstrips our current ability to supply it.

In four short years HealthCorps has grown by word of mouth among school administrators and local governments from two schools in the Northeast to 44 schools in 7 states. Next year, we plan to be in 65 schools in twelve states. There are hundreds of schools in all 50 states that would like our support if we could provide it.

Similarly, there is a strong spirit of service on America's college campuses and college seniors are motivated to serve their community before returning for graduate or medical studies. Last year, we received 20 applications for each available Coordinator position. This year, we expect to receive 30+ applications for each available Coordinator position.

We anticipate a buoyant future with 1,000 schools in 50 states by 2012, where we'll reach 300,000 students and 750,000 family members and friends.

In the not too distant future, through a potential retail alliance, we believe HealthCorps can play a part in shaping how consumers navigate their grocery store – analogous to a “Consumer Reports” recommendation.

Additionally, since our participation in the February 26th Senate hearing on Integrative Medicine, we have begun exploring how the members of the HealthCorps Advisory Board can help to establish baseline requirements for a “integrative health coach” curriculum and accredited degree. This licensed health professional could communicate simple but invaluable messages that could hasten a patient's recovery, prevent a healthy person from developing a disorder, and assist a chronic disorder patient in from developing disease. We support the establishment of a profession based on prevention rather than surgery or prescriptions

WHY AND HOW WE SHOULD BE A MODEL FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

If we reach our goals, and we believe we can, we'll activate communities through hundreds of local grassroots wellness events a year...And the founding principal behind this activation is service - convincing people to give some of their time to show others what they have learned – in our case how to embrace simple changes that will endure for life and make this nation a healthier happier one.

The HealthCorps model is a “shovel ready” service program. It can scale quickly. It can adapt to the unique health concerns of individual geographies and neighborhoods. It can start making a difference on the ground immediately.

The HealthCorps model is also uniquely positioned to serve as a hub or anchor for other community wellness and health initiatives. By working with the partners like the National Association of Community Health Centers (“NACHC”), we plan to soon give HealthCorps high school students the opportunity to do service learning at clinics in their communities. Also, our Coordinators will actively encourage graduating seniors to consider applying to do service at a clinic as a NACHC “Community Healthcorps” intern, funded through AmeriCorps.

We are strategically partnered with hundreds of non-profits and other organizations across the seven states such as Donna Karan's Initiative Urban Zen, The United Federation of Teachers, The David Lynch Foundation, The Tiger Woods Foundation, The Kellogg Foundation, The Children's Aid Society and The Food Bank, the fitness industry and far too many to name here. We invite our partners to participate in all our community and school events because we know it is going to take a village to spark a wellness movement and fire up more people to give of their time and effort.

HealthCorps' mission transcends an individual approach to curing poor lifestyle habits. We embrace a holistic community approach to health (psycho/bio/social) ---focusing significant work on changing the physical environment in the school and community.

We are embarking upon several projects in conjunction with the Center for Disease Control ("CDC"), and are hoping to launch a "Fit Town Challenge" this fall - A wellness challenge to five large American communities with HealthCorps programs over the next 12 months to see who can actualize the greatest change in their towns to create an environment conducive to wellness. We will work with media partners to bring this challenge to a broad American audience.

In schools, many HealthCorps Coordinators campaign for the removal of sodas in vending machines and the replacement of fried fatty foods in the cafeteria with more whole grain products, fresh produce and offerings of dark green lettuce and healthy seeds and nuts. Some students have also developed school and community gardens. In New York City, in partnership with Commissioner Frieden and New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH") HealthCorps students have surveyed offerings in local bodegas, as a way to identify neighborhoods needing more access to healthier choices.

At HealthCorps, Senators, it is easy to be inspired by the concept of service. We are supported by active board members who give of their time and expertise --like Dr. Mike Roizen, Integrative Medicine visionary and Head of Anesthesiology for the Cleveland Clinic - people with unimaginably busy lives at the very top of their professions who still find time to give back. Celebrity athletes and performers have also joined HealthCorps in our national service mantra by speaking at community events and using the media to spread our message.

I am supported by a seasoned staff of great folks who walk the talk and inspire me with their service in their personal lives every day. They have spent time at Teach for America, as grassroots activists and as HealthCorps Coordinators.

But as Martin Luther King, Jr. once said **"Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve."** I hope HealthCorps may contribute in some way to inspire more Americans to lose themselves in causes greater than themselves. I thank you for your time, and for your recognition of our program as well as all programs of national service.