

My name is Dr. Robert D. Putnam. I am the Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Emeritus at the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government and author of numerous books, most notably *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, *Our Kids*, *Making Democracy Work*, and *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*. I was a founding board member of American Exchange Project in 2019.

American Exchange Project is exactly the medicine that American democracy needs right now—a well-tested, well-managed program to bring our young people together across lines of division nationwide. This experience opens students' eyes to completely different socioeconomic groups, cultural groups, racial and ethnic groups, and political groups. And they come to love the kids that they meet. Astonishingly, in a short period of time, it creates a sense of connection, bridging social capital, making real connections with people who are different from them in every possible way. I believe my work has proven these kinds of connections have a profound impact on our civic health as a society, on a citizen's belief in our democracy and way of life, and on that essential moral and democratic notion that, fundamentally, we're all in this together. I can't think of a more important lesson for American students on the cusp of adulthood to learn deeply, and I applaud and heartily endorse the Rhode Island legislature for introducing a bill that would make this experience a reality for many of its students in the next few years and, perhaps one day, every young Rhode Islander.

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