Proposals for a national youth service program that could affect as many as 2.6 million young people between the ages of 17 and 26 were considered at a conference at Brandeis University last Saturday. About 300 public service workers, government representatives, and college and high school students were invited to the day-long conference by Senator Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.).

Tsongas does not favor a mandatory National Youth Service (NYS) program or a military draft. He proposed that a presidential commission be formed to survey options from around the nation and reach a consensus on NYS. "This conference is the first major step in that process," he said.

The gathering was held to "send up a trial balloon," according to Tsongas, and no fixed program was presented. All of the speakers and panelists invited seemed to favor a form of the NYS that would combine the best elements of CETA, VISTA, Urban Action, etc., and the military.

Several panels suggested that some form of "GI-bill-like" federal benefit package be offered to NYS participants as a form of motivation for a voluntary service.

The gathering included a five-minute demonstration by students noting the NYS proposals immediately preceded Tsongas's keynote speech at the close of the conference.

One suggestion, by New England ACTION director John Torkan, was that existing civilian service programs such as VISTA and ACTION could simply be expanded to create a greater number of voluntary service openings. He commented that VISTA annually must turn away many volunteers due to lack of sufficient government support.

Emary Jackson, President of the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts, said that the different services needed to "link-up," and urged his seminar to "think comprehensively — combine the best elements of CETA, VISTA, Urban Action, etc., and the military." Jackson is a former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) member, "which I consider to have been a form of national service." Jackson also said he saw a national service program as a way of reducing youth unemployment.

Many representatives of service organizations seemed to see a national service program as a way of bolstering their own organizations. Anne McDermott, the director of the Urban Arts Project in Deafness, suggested the NYS could provide training for handicapped people. GCA Corporation President Milton Greenberg said the NYS "should be a partnership between industry and government". Navy Commander William Boer III noted that civilian service could absorb the 38 percent of the 17-26 year old age group that is unfit for military service.