



Pass the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act (All Meetings)

Our Request

- **The Ask for Your Members of Congress**
 - **Please become a co-sponsor of the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act, and help make sure this bi-partisan legislation is passed this year!**

(UPDATE: In the House of Representatives, H.R. 1273, the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act, was introduced on March 1st. The Senate version of this legislation is expected to be introduced soon)

Background

- Reauthorization is the process by which Congress prescribes changes, additions, and deletions to original legislation. The Peace Corps Act, which formally established the agency, was signed into law by President Kennedy on September 22, 1961.
- The current Peace Corps Reauthorization Act was first introduced in 2019 in the 116th Congress. Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA) stated he wanted this legislation to support both serving and returned volunteers.
- In the previous (117th) Congress, Representatives Garamendi and Garret Graves (R-LA) re-introduced the legislation (H.R. 1456). On September 19, 2022, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1456 by a vote of 290 to 125 (NOTE: Go to NPCA's State Resources website page** and look up your House Rep to see how they voted).
- In the United States Senate, similar legislation (S. 4466) was introduced on June 23, 2022 by Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and James Risch (R-ID), the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Fifteen Senators – eight Democrats and seven Republicans – were cosponsors of S. 4466. (NOTE: Go to NPCA's State Resources website page** and look up your Senators to see if they co-sponsored S.4466).
- On July 21, 2022, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved advancing the legislation. Unfortunately, in the closing days of the previous Congress, when unanimous Senate approval became necessary to pass S.4466, the legislation was blocked by Senator Rand Paul (R-KY).
- While various Peace Corps legislation has been introduced and passed by Congress over the years, it has been nearly 25 years since comprehensive legislation to reauthorize the Peace Corps has been passed.

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Content of the Legislation

As the Senate and House authors of the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act work to advance their respective legislation, there has been a great deal of collaboration in an effort to make sure both bills contain the same provisions. The House bill and the anticipated Senate bill are expected to include a wide range of important provisions. Here are some of the primary items:

- **Extension of the Sexual Assault Advisory Council:** In 2011, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act created an advisory council made up of experts in the field to annually review agency policies and training materials, and offer recommendations on how to best reduce risks for Volunteers and respond effectively and compassionately to those who are victims of crime, especially sexual assault. In 2018, the Sam Farr and Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act extended the work of the council through 2023. The current Peace Corps Reauthorization Act would further extend the work of the council through 2027.
- **Enhanced Whistleblower Protections:** Language in the legislation outlines recommended procedures and policies to further protect Volunteers from acts of reprisal or retaliation.
- **Access to Antimalarial Drugs and Hygiene Products:** The legislation instructs the Peace Corps to consult with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding recommendations for prescribing malaria prophylaxis, and training to ensure medical personnel are aware of the side effects of various medications. The legislation also instructs the agency to establish policies to ensure access to various hygiene products for volunteers.
- **Increased Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE):** The legislation would protect the full NCE benefit for RPCVs should they be unable to work due to service-related illness or injury upon their return, or if there is a federal government shutdown or hiring freeze. The standard length of NCE would also be extended from one year to two years.
- **Interruptions to Service:** In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislation instructs the agency to establish policies for the safe return of volunteers who face evacuation. It also calls for an expedited process should such volunteers need to re-apply for service.
- **Pacific Region Presence:** Within one year of passage, the legislation requires the Peace Corps to provide a strategy to reasonably and safely increase the number of volunteers in the Pacific region.
- **Staff Suspension Without Pay:** The legislation includes a provision allowing the Peace Corps Director to suspend (without pay) any employee determined to have engaged in serious misconduct. An appeal process is outlined in the bill for a suspended employee.
- **National Advisory Council:** The legislation would re-establish a Peace Corps National Advisory Council. The activities of the council would include advising on ways to further promote diversity, equity and inclusion, and removing financial barriers that may prevent individuals from applying to serve.

Key Talking Points

- **Status of Legislation – House:** Peace Corps Reauthorization Act legislation was introduced in the House. **For House meetings ask your Reps to co-sponsor House Bill 1273.**
- **Status of Legislation – Senate:** A Senate bill has not yet been introduced. **For Senate meetings, ask your Senators to co-sponsor Peace Corps Reauthorization legislation when it is introduced.**
- **This is the Moment!** In all meetings, emphasize that this legislation is the top priority of National Peace Corps Association, and we need lawmakers to pass this legislation this year. As a growing number of volunteers are returning to service, and the first volunteers will be returning home from service in mid-2024, it is important to pass this legislation to create a stronger and improved Peace Corps moving forward.
- **Say Thank You!** Before your meeting, check NPCA's State Resources webpage.** For your House members, check and see how they voted on the final passage of last year's Peace Corps Reauthorization Act. For your Senators, check and see if they co-sponsored the Reauthorization Act. In those meetings say thank you for those who took positive action, and urge them to support and help pass the legislation this year.
- **Bi-Partisan Legislation:** The Peace Corps has historically enjoyed strong, bi-partisan support. Many Republicans and Democrats came together in 2022 to support this legislation. We hope this will happen again in 2023 to get this legislation passed!
- **Pick Your Passion:** During your meetings, you and your team will not have time to discuss every item. Discuss with your team and determine which 2 - 4 items you feel most strongly about and want to speak to.
- **Respect and Support the Peace Corps:** The work of the Peace Corps deserves our respect and support. This legislation contains a number of key provisions that support those who serve our nation as Peace Corps Volunteers.

And...Feel Free to Raise Items Removed from the Legislation

We are very excited about the many important items in the pending Peace Corps Reauthorization Act. At the same time, many important provisions had to be removed in order to advance the legislation. While we want to emphasize the importance of passing the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act this year, it is okay to also express disappointment that several important advancements to support volunteers and RPCVs are not included. These include:

- **Workers Compensation:** For years, RPCVs who come home with serious service related illness and injuries – making them eligible for workers compensation – receive compensation rates that make it extremely difficult for them to live. A proposal to provide a modest increase in compensation was removed from the bill.
- **Student Loans:** The Senate version of the Reauthorization Act had included language to clarify that Volunteers are fully eligible for the federal government's Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. It also proposed deferring student loan interest payments (as well as the already deferred general payments) for federal student loans while volunteers were serving. These items were removed from the legislation.
- **Post-Service Health Insurance:** A provision to have the Peace Corps expand paid post-service health insurance from one to two months has been removed.
- **Virtual Service:** Language originally in the House bill to codify the agency's pilot virtual service program was removed. This does not interrupt the pilot program, but it does not incorporate by statute virtual service as a formal part of Peace Corps service opportunities.