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The Next Step in Changing the World

October 3, 2022

The Honorable Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Room S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Room S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

We write to you as a bipartisan, unified group of former Peace Corps Directors to express our full support for the swift passage of the *Peace Corps Reauthorization Act* (S. 4466). We believe that now, with Volunteers returning to the field for the first time in two years, after being withdrawn due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that the Peace Corps return with a renewed sense of purpose. That is what passage of this legislation will do.

If passed, this would be the first full reauthorization of the agency since 1999. It has been more than two decades since full reauthorization. Multiple reforms included in this bill are long overdue and urgently needed—both to solidify this core instrument of American soft power, and to ensure that the agency has the tools to meet the needs of a changed world.

Fortunately, this Congress is well positioned to pass this legislation and move it to President Biden's desk for his signature. The companion version in the House, H.R. 1456, passed on September 19 in a strong bipartisan vote under suspension of the Rules. That bill was co-authored by Reps. John Garamendi (D-CA) and Garret Graves (R-LA), with the former being the sole Returned Peace Corps Volunteer currently serving in Congress.

In the Senate, the bill is jointly authored by the leaders of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and James Risch (R-ID). It has already been unanimously passed out of committee on a voice vote and currently has six Republican and nine Democratic cosponsors. It is a well-crafted bill that reflects strong bipartisan input and ideas.

It is this demonstration of strong bipartisan support that gives us hope that the bill can be passed this Congressional session. Doing so would be a testament to America's enduring bipartisan commitment to those who serve abroad on behalf of our country. As you both know, the Peace Corps was founded in

1961 with a vision of promoting American values and expertise around the world—and to then bringing back home to our communities deeper global understanding through lessons learned by our Volunteers.

More than 240,000 of our fellow citizens have answered the call to serve as Peace Corps Volunteers, advancing our nation's security during turbulent times overseas. We therefore ask that you do all that you can to ensure that the Senate version of the *Peace Corps Reauthorization Act* moves forward, either as part of an existing legislative vehicle, such as the *National Defense Authorization Act*, or independently. With this act's passage, we can move one step closer to having the type of Peace Corps that the American people deserve and that will ensure we work together effectively with partner nations around the world.

Sincerely,

Carol Bellamy (1993–95) Clinton Administration

Richard Celeste (1979–81) Carter Administration

Nicholas Crow (1973–74) Nixon Administration

Mark Gearan (1995–99) Clinton Administration

Carrie Hessler-Radelet (2014–17) Obama Administration

Josephine (Jody) Olsen (2018–21) Trump Administration

Mark Schneider (1999–2001) Clinton Administration

Ronald Tschetter (2006–09) George W. Bush Administration

Gaddi Vasquez (2002–06) George W. Bush Administration

Aaron Williams (2009–12) Obama Administration

cc:

Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Chair, Foreign Relations Committee

Senator James Risch (D-ID), Ranking Member, Foreign Relations Committee

Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Chair, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), Ranking Member, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), Chair, Armed Services Committee

Senator James Inhofe (R-OK), Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee

Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), Chair, Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee

Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), Ranking Member, Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee