

**The Peace Corps Reauthorization Act**

**(House Bill 1456; Senate Bill 4466)**

**Analysis**

Provisions that are the same or very similar in both bills

* **Readjustment Allowance:** Both bills would update the Peace Corps Act by establishing a minimum readjustment allowance of $375 per month going forward (The Peace Corps Act lists the minimum at $125 per month. The current readjustment allowance is $419 per month).
* **Post Service Health Insurance:** Both bills would extend Peace Corps paid health insurance for returning Volunteers from one month to two months. RPCVs could continue using the insurance for an additional month at their expense. Both bills provide details on how the agency will assist new RPCVs with finding appropriate health insurance after that.
* **Malaria**: Both bills instruct the Peace Corps Director to consult with the Centers for Disease Control on malaria prophylaxis and implement recommendations to the extent practicable. It instructs medical staff in malaria countries to be trained on understanding and recognizing side effects of various medications.
* **Menstrual/hygiene products**: Both bills instruct the Peace Corps Director (within 180 days of passage of the legislation) to establish a comprehensive policy to ensure Volunteers have access to hygiene products as needed. The Senate bill references hygiene products, while the House bill references menstrual products (as proposed in H.R. 1467, the Menstrual Equity in the Peace Corps Act).
* **Non Competitive Eligibility (NCE)**: For returning Volunteers who seek federal employment, both bills propose two years of NCE. The Senate bill sets out parameters for two years of NCE, but includes general language giving the agency leeway to warrant the two year extension. The House bill simply calls for two years of NCE. Additionally, both bills extend the time of NCE in the event of a federal hiring freeze or government shutdown. Both bills also stipulate that NCE for Volunteers who come home with service related illness or injury does not commence if an individual is deemed eligible for workers compensation.
* **“Whistleblower” Protections:** Both bills provide an outline for the protection of Peace Corps Volunteers against reprisals or retaliation. Both bills provide sections for relief, however the Senate bill includes language defining relief as including monetary damages, attorney fees and other actions “necessary to make the volunteer whole”.
* **American Samoa Service Opportunities:** Both bills include language that will allow citizens of American Samoa to serve in the Peace Corps (as do citizens currently residing in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands).
* **Volunteer Security:** Both bills contain language calling for a regular agreement between the agency and the State Department’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security related to security support and protection of Volunteers and staff members serving abroad.
* **National Advisory Council**: Both bills call for the re-establishment of a seven member National Advisory Council. There are some differences regarding appointment procedures and RPCV representation. Both bills charge the Advisory Council with addressing diversity initiatives. The Senate bill has more detailed language regarding the council’s role to address diversity, equity and inclusion.

Provisions that are different

* **Authorization of Appropriations:** The House bill proposes $500 million for the Peace Corps in FY 2023 and $550 million for FY 2024; The Senate bill continues flat funding of $410.5 million through FY 2027
* **Volunteer Support During Major Disruptions to Service:** In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic shutdown of global operations, both bills speak to restoring service opportunities for volunteers when major disruptions occur. Language and specifics differ. **The House bill** speaks to waiving non-medical and non-security screenings for Volunteers who are reapplying; expediting medical clearance; seek to allow Volunteers to return to countries where they were serving; and authorizes the Peace Corps Director to authorizing separation allowances. **The Senate bill** speaks in more general terms in expediting the return to service, and also restricts the return to service in China (a program already closed by the Peace Corps).
* **Sexual Assault Advisory Council:** Both bills extend the work of the congressionally mandated Sexual Assault Advisory Council, which is scheduled to conclude next year. The House bill would extend the work of the Council through 2025. The Senate bill would extend the work through 2027.
* **Workers Compensation Increase:** Both bills propose an increase in the rate of compensation received by Volunteers who come home unable to work because of illness or injuries incurred during service. Currently, RPCVs receiving workers compensation are expected to live on an annual compensation rate of roughly $25,000. The House bill would increase that compensation rate by nearly $12,000 annually. The Senate bill would increase the compensation rate by roughly $3,500 annually.
* **Mental Health Services:** The House bill recommends reports to Congress on issues related to mental health standards and services within one year of passage of the legislation. The Senate bill calls for ensuring the Peace Corps is providing access to mental health professionals for Peace Corps Volunteers.

Provisions in the Senate Bill, not in the House Bill

* **Student Loans:** The Senate bill would suspend federal student loan interest during the duration of Volunteer service; It also allows for members of the Peace Corps to receive credit during their time of service under any income based repayment program or the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program run by the Department of Education. These provisions are not in the current House bill.
* **Suspension Without Pay:** In response to the tragic killing of Tanzanian Rabia Issa at the hands of a Peace Corps employee, the Senate bill gives the agency the authority to suspend an employee without pay if they are engaged in serious misconduct which could lead to removal for cause. This provision is not in the current House bill.

Provisions in the House Bill, not in the Senate Bill

* **Virtual Service**: The House bill would authorize a pilot virtual service program the Peace Corps has been operating. This provision is not in the current Senate bill.
* **Drug Use Policy:** The House bill would establish a zero tolerance drug use policy among Volunteers and trainees. This provision is not in the current Senate bill.
* **Peace Corps Domestic Service:** The House bill would codify the opportunities for Peace Corps Volunteers to assist in the U.S. at the request of another agency (as was the case with Hurricane Katrina and more recently, to address the COVID pandemic). This provision is not in the current Senate bill.
* **Respect for Peace Corps Volunteers Act:** The House bill includes this long sought legislation to allow the Peace Corps symbol to be used at RPCV gravesites and death notices. This provision is not in the current Senate bill.