

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 28, 2019

Chairwoman Nita Lowey
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations and Related Programs
Room HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Hal Rogers
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations and Related Programs
2046 Rayburn
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Rogers,

Thank you for your commitment to the Peace Corps. Because of your efforts, the agency is poised for even greater impact at a time when the unique role of the Peace Corps is urgently needed. To ensure the agency has the resources it needs to further its mission, we respectfully ask that you appropriate \$450 million for Peace Corps in Fiscal Year 2020.

The 21st Century Peace Corps is more critical to America's role in the world than ever before. Today, approximately 7,400 Volunteers serve in 65 countries to train, elevate, and inspire the next generation of global leaders. A Volunteer may teach entrepreneurship and business management to women in Nicaragua, combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, or build the capacity of local civil society associations in Ukraine. They also are key grassroots partners for implementing presidential programs, including the recently launched Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative; an inter-agency project for the advancement of women's free and full participation in the global economy. Every month over 20,000 women participate in economic empowerment initiatives led by Peace Corps Volunteers.

Volunteers are more than just technical advisers; they are the face of America abroad. Immersed in the local language and culture, posted at the furthest reaches of the world, and trusted by local decision-makers and institutions, the Peace Corps' grassroots diplomacy is not only cost-efficient and unequaled, it is urgently needed. America's military leaders agree. In February 2017, 121 retired three and four-star generals and admirals wrote to Congress, "...Peace Corps and other development agencies are critical to preventing conflict and reducing the need to put our men and women in uniform in harm's way." Within America's soft power arsenal, there simply is no other institution that more effectively manifests the American idea to the world than the Peace Corps. This soft power abroad can translate directly into tangible improvements along our own borders. Volunteers in places like Peru, Nicaragua, and Mexico are helping to remedy the horrendous conditions that push people to leave their homelands in search of a better life abroad, who can then return home equipped with a deep understanding of these international issues and well-equipped to contribute through civil society or as members of the federal workforce trained in cross-cultural communications.

The Peace Corps works to accomplish its legislative mandate within the context of unique security challenges, and the agency has taken steps to improve the health and safety of its Volunteers as it implements provisions within the Sam Farr Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act

of 2018 (P.L 115-256). By ensuring the presence of designated and better prepared professionals within each post that are equipped to provide quality care for a myriad of medical issues and support in the immediate aftermath of assault, and by making the Office of Victim Advocacy a permanent fixture of the agency, the Peace Corps has taken strides in initiating needed reforms. Agency leadership also continues to demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of Volunteers through the implementation of other data driven initiatives such as Healthy Volunteer 2020 and MySafety Guide.

However, there remain residual health care policy issues within the agency that require increased budgetary support, particularly as it pertains to supporting Peace Corps Volunteers disabled during the course of their service. Increased funding and enhanced compensation levels for Volunteers temporarily or permanently disabled as a result of their service abroad is necessary to ensure that Peace Corps can fulfill its commitment to the health and safety of American citizens who choose to serve.

Peace Corps' funding levels remain unadjusted since FY 2016, and the agency's effective operating budget has decreased by approximately 20 million dollars due to inflation. This has occurred during a period of time in which the Peace Corps has received an influx of applications, with 19,000 applicants applying for just 3,700 positions in FY 2019. This also is occurring during a time in which the Peace Corps has a historic opportunity win new friends in new countries among former rivals, such as Vietnam or Sri Lanka. Retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal has called this gap between applicants and service opportunities "democratic energy wasted and a generation of patriotism needlessly squandered."

We thank you for your efforts to provide Peace Corps with the resources it needs to fuel the next generation of American leadership, and we respectfully ask that you make this \$450 million investment in the agency for fiscal year 2020.

Sincerely,

JOE KENNEDY
Member of Congress

JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress

GARRET GRAVES
Member of Congress