



ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Virtual District Office Meetings





Dear NPCA Advocate,

In these extraordinary times, this booklet is designed to provide you with information and materials you can review and use as you prepare for virtual district office meetings.

Materials you can use if you are preparing for Senate and/or House meetings can be found in this document.

At the end of the document, there is an appendix which includes links and documents that will provide a comprehensive package of background information. Please note that overview and talking point documents are for background, and not for distribution or inclusion in the leave behind packets.

Thank you!

Jonathan Pearson
NPCA Advocacy Director

House and Senate Meetings

PEACE CORPS FUNDING

Background

- In February 2020, President Trump proposed just over \$401.2 million for the Peace Corps for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 (which begins this October). That represents a \$9.3 million cut to the current \$410.5 million in funding for the agency.
- On March 15, 2020, Peace Corps announced the suspension of all overseas programs due to the coronavirus pandemic. All volunteers were safely evacuated from their posts.
- In late March, Congress overwhelmingly approved and the president signed legislation that includes \$88 million to support Peace Corps for various costs related to the evacuation and readjustment for Volunteers and overseas staff.
- On July 24, 2020 the House of Representatives passed a State/Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that includes level funding of \$410.5 million for Peace Corps.
- As of the beginning of August, the Senate has not taken action on FY 2021 appropriations for Peace Corps and other international affairs programs.
- Baseline funding for Peace Corps has been held at roughly \$410 million for five years. FY 2021 would mark the sixth consecutive year of flat funding.

Talking Points

- **Level Funding in a Time of COVID-19:** Sustaining the \$410.5 million appropriation at a moment when no Volunteers are overseas would be a significant victory.
- **Redeployment Will Come With Costs:** Peace Corps posts remain open in roughly 60 nations and regular program assessments and conversations continue. Peace Corps is planning for gradual redeployment in FY 2021. This appropriation will ensure the agency has the funds to carry out this delicate redeployment in a thoughtful, appropriate manner that will cover costs for ongoing recruitment, difficult redeployment logistics and a commitment to safety and well-being in a post-pandemic world.
- **A Moment for Congressional Support:** In March and April a bipartisan group of 209 members of Congress signed Dear Colleague letters urging robust funding for Peace Corps in FY 2021. As Peace Corps prepares for its 60th anniversary, at a moment where its future is insecure, Congress needs to demonstrate its commitment to redeployment.
- **Domestic Dividend:** Peace Corps is much more than two years of service overseas. Share a story about how you or your affiliate group continues to provide services to the international and domestic community. NPCA conservatively estimates that in 2019, RPCV affiliate groups donated well over \$500,000, while individual RPCVs provided more than two million hours of volunteer service.
- **Share Your Story:** While it is critical to be brief, it is always good to share with lawmakers or staff part of your personal Peace Corps story. Was there a particular success story from your service? How does Peace Corps make a difference around the world? Or, how did Peace Corps enrich or impact your professional development, commitment to service?

House: H.R. 6833 / H.R. 6560
Senate: S. 3700 / S. 3642

PEACE CORPS COVID-19 LEGISLATION

Background

- In the aftermath of Peace Corps' decision to temporarily suspend its operations and bring home more than 7,000 volunteers and trainees, various Members of Congress prepared legislation to address several issues in the aftermath of the evacuation.
- Two bills in the House (H.R. 6833 and H.R. 6560) and two bills in the Senate (S. 3700 and S. 3642) cover three basic items to varying degrees, described below.
- These bills call for utilizing the skills of evacuated Peace Corps Volunteers for priority employment consideration to address our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The bills call on Peace Corps to report on its plans for redeploying volunteers as soon as practicable and expediting the applications of evacuated volunteers who wish to return.
- These bills seek to expand the length of time that evacuated volunteers can purchase post-service health insurance.
- [Follow this link](#) to see the legislation and if your member(s) of Congress are already co-sponsors.

Talking Points

- **Say Thank You!** Most of these bills have bipartisan support. Ask your members to co-sponsor these pieces of legislation. If they already have done so, say thank you!
- **Demonstrate Peace Corps Support at this Critical Moment:** At perhaps the most vulnerable time in the 60 year history of the Peace Corps, co-sponsoring this legislation demonstrates a strong show of support for Peace Corps' future. This is particularly the case with language focusing on the redeployment of Volunteers.
- **Utilize the Skills of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers:** With nearly 75 percent of primary field assignments pertaining to community health care, education, and youth development, Peace Corps Volunteers are skilled in program areas that can be extremely helpful in our national response to the pandemic. Having volunteered in challenging regions with limited assets, Peace Corps Volunteers develop extremely important skills (resilience, creativity, and resourcefulness).
- **Redeployment Must Be Timely But Practicable:** The legislation promotes the need for Peace Corps to redeploy as soon as possible, but sets no timeline and emphasizes that it should be done in a manner that is feasible and safe.
- **Health Care is Critical:** The legislation allows for expanded access for Peace Corps' post-service health care for evacuees who might still need it, but provides no further financial resources. The last thing that should happen to evacuees is the loss of health insurance in the midst of a national health emergency.
- **Voice of Evacuees:** If an evacuee is part of your meeting, make sure they have the chance to speak to any of the items included in the legislation, or any other key needs evacuees continue to face.

Senate Meetings Only

CO-SPONSOR THE CORPS ACT

S.3964

Background

- Nationwide unemployment soared during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, jumping from just over six million U.S. citizens in February to more than 20 million in May. The national unemployment rate remains above ten percent.
- On June 16, **Senators Chris Coons** (D-DE) and **Roger Wicker** (R-MS) introduced the *Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act*.
- The legislation proposes doubling national service positions from an initial 75,000 to 150,000. Over three years, positions would increase to 250,000.
- Extend priority enrollment to Peace Corps, U.S. Fulbright, and AmeriCorps participants whose service or grants was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The legislation would prioritize activities pertaining to public health, economic opportunity, education support, and nutrition insecurity.
- Ensure that individuals' financial resources do not limit participation by temporarily increasing the AmeriCorps living allowance to 175 percent of the federal poverty line.
- As of August 4, 2020, this legislation has strong bipartisan support with 17 co-sponsors (9 Republicans, 7 Democrats, 1 Independent). [See if your Senator\(s\) is a co-sponsors here.](#)

Talking Points

- **Say Thank You!** If your Senator(s) are already co-sponsors of S. 3964, thank them for their support of this important legislation.
- **Utilize the Skills of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers:** With nearly 75 percent of primary field assignments pertaining to community health care, education and youth development, Peace Corps Volunteers are skilled in program areas that can be extremely helpful in our national response to the pandemic. Having volunteered in challenging regions with limited assets, Peace Corps Volunteers develop extremely important skills (resilience, creativity, and resourcefulness).
- **Ready to Serve:** A May 2020 survey conducted by Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation (WCAPS) found that when 461 evacuees were asked if they would be interested in assisting domestic missions regarding public health, food security, or economic stability, 95% of the respondents said yes.
- **Recognize Peace Corps' Importance as Part of National Service:** Thank lawmakers for recognizing the role evacuated Peace Corps Volunteers (and other RPCVs) can play in the pandemic response. At the same time, emphasize that protecting our citizens from current (or future) pandemics requires a global response, and we need to build that support through Peace Corps and other international assistance programs.

House Meetings Only

CO-SPONSOR H.R.3456

The Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2019

Background

- This bipartisan bill is sponsored by the Co-Chair of the Peace Corps Caucus, Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA; RPCV Ethiopia). The lead Republican sponsor is Peace Corps Caucus CoChair Garrett Graves (R-LA).
- The legislation was introduced June 25, 2019, prior to the global pandemic.
- An authorization is a congressional power that gives an agency or program the legal right to exist. Most government programs that Congress appropriates money for must first be approved by Congress in a separate piece of legislation known as an “authorizing bill.” Authorizing bills describe the direction a program should take and create the legal authority for the program to operate. The original Peace Corps authorization bill was passed in September 1961. Peace Corps has not been reauthorized since 1999.
- While Peace Corps has not been reauthorized, over the past decade, Congress has passed important Peace Corps reform legislation including the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act (passed in 2011) and the Sam Farr/Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act (passed in 2018).
- H.R.3456 continues this progress. Congressman Garamendi has stated he wants this legislation to focus on supporting (future) serving and returned Peace Corps volunteers.
- H.R.3456 proposes \$450 million in yearly funding for the Peace Corps, an increase over the flat \$410 million funding level provided by Congress in recent years.
- H.R.3456 directs Peace Corps to establish new volunteer opportunities that promote Internet technology-adoption in developing countries and engage tech-savvy Americans.
- H.R.3456 would re-establish a National Advisory Council to bring more exposure to the agency and its work.
- H.R.3456 includes the language of the Respect for Peace Corps Volunteers Act (H.R.1411) sponsored by Rep. Albio Sires (D-NJ) since 2013. This language would allow the Peace Corps symbol to be used at gravesites or in death notices.
- H.R.3456 pauses Peace Corps Volunteers’ 12-month hiring preference for most federal job openings during any federal hiring freeze, government shutdown, or while a volunteer comes home and receives federal worker’s compensation benefits for any injury during their Peace Corps service.
- H.R.3456 increases the federal workers’ compensation rate for Peace Corps Volunteers injured or disabled during their service from a GS-7 to a GS-11 level. At the current rate, many volunteers seriously struggle to live independently and cover basic expenses.
- As of February 15, 2020, H.R.3456 has 48 co-sponsors (43 D; 5 R). The five Republican co-sponsors are Representatives Graves (R-LA), Cook (R-CA), Rutherford (R-FL), Cole (R-OK), and Radewagen (R-AS).

House Meetings Only

CO-SPONSOR H.R.3456

The Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2019

Talking Points

- **Respect and Support Peace Corps:** The work of the Peace Corps deserves our respect and support. This legislation contains a number of key provisions that recognize and honor those who serve our nation by serving in Peace Corps.
- **Funding:** Over the past five years, flat Peace Corps funding has resulted in Peace Corps losing its effective purchasing power by roughly \$40 million. This legislation recommends \$450 million in funding for Peace Corps, bringing the agency more in line with its funding level achieved five years ago. While we are working to secure level funding for FY 2021 as Peace Corps plans to redeploy, we want to note that as Peace Corps rebuilds its presence, an increase in funding will be overdue.
- **Respect Act Included:** Another key provision is the inclusion of the Respect for Peace Corps Volunteers Act, allowing the use of the Peace Corps symbol at gravesites and in death notices of those who served in the Peace Corps.
- **Disability Pay:** A long standing need for improvement involves increasing the pay rate for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who are disabled due to illness or injuries stemming from their Peace Corps service. By raising the pay scale based on the current GS-7 level to GS-11, monthly disability pay would increase from approximately \$1,800 to more than \$2,500.
- **Disability Pay Impacts:** The last figures available (2015) indicated there were approximately 400 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers receiving short- or long-term disability payments. At the time, the Congressional Budget Office estimated this increase would cost an additional one to two million dollars.
- **Congress Decides Disability Fiscal Impact:** Because Peace Corps is required to reimburse the U.S. Labor Department for all disability payments to RPCVs, those reimbursements come from the budget that Congress approves for the agency. Thus, there is no fiscal impact on the Labor Department, and the added costs to provide much needed support to disabled RPCVs results in increased costs only if Congress allows it through its Peace Corps appropriation.
- **Enhanced Non-Competitive Eligibility:** One of the few post-service benefits Returned Peace Corps Volunteers receive is one year of non-competitive eligibility for federal hiring. H.R.3456 supports RPCVs in getting their full one-year opportunity by “stopping the clock” on eligibility should there be a federal hiring freeze or government shutdown. The legislation also delays the one year of eligibility for RPCVs who come home with a service related disability that prevents them from working.

House Meetings Only

CO-SPONSOR H.R.6118

The Menstrual Equity in the Peace Corps Act

Background

- This legislation was introduced by Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY) on March 5, 2020.
- Peace Corps regularly notes “There is nothing more important to Peace Corps than the health, safety, and security” of volunteers.
- During congressional travel overseas to Peace Corps sites and conversations with some Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, concerns have arisen about women’s access to menstrual products in certain countries.
- Some Peace Corps Medical Officers and staff have reportedly created strategies to ensure that volunteers are able to access menstrual hygiene products without paying a significant amount of money. However, this is not a consistent policy. Other volunteers are left to purchase the products out of pocket, or from the same stipend that is given to their fellow PCVs.
- Under the proposed legislation, within six months of passage, the Peace Corps director would be required to enact a comprehensive policy that makes available free menstrual products to PCVs or universally increases stipends for those PCVs who require them.
- On July 24, 2020 the House of Representatives passed a State/Foreign Operations appropriations bill that includes support language which would direct the Peace Corps director to report on implementing H.R. 6118.
- As of August 2020, 21 House members have co-sponsored this legislation.

Talking Points

- **Volunteer Health is Paramount:** Peace Corps regularly notes “There is nothing more important to Peace Corps than the health, safety, and security” of volunteers.
- **Uneven Access:** Reports to congressional staff from volunteers in the field and from Returned Peace Corps Volunteers indicate there is uneven access to menstrual hygiene products while in service, based on either the country of service or the region in-country where volunteers serve.
- **Young Women in the Majority:** According to the last Peace Corps field statistics (as of September 30, 2019), nearly two out of three volunteers who had been serving in 60 countries were female, while more than 90% of volunteers are under the age of 50.
- **The Right Thing to Do:** While there may be some (relatively modest) fiscal impact on this legislation, we need to make sure the basic health needs of future female volunteers are met, regardless of where they serve.
- **The Time to Fix this Provision is Now:** As Peace Corps prepares to redeploy volunteers in the field in 2021, now is the moment to pass this legislation so the new policy is in place for the redeployed volunteers.

OTHER ISSUES TO NOTE

The following items are also before Congress in various ways. There may be some instances where we will call on advocates to take targeted action on these matters. If you want more information on any of these items, contact us at advocacy@peacecorpsconnect.org.

- **Peace Corps Commemorative:** The Peace Corps Commemorative Act, passed in 2014, needs an extension for its work to continue. Great progress has been made by the Peace Corps Commemorative Foundation. Recently, the exact same legislation to extend the time to complete the commemorative has been introduced by Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) (S.4128), and by Congressmen Joe Kennedy III (D-MA) and Garrett Graves (R-LA) (H.R. 7460). This very brief legislation has no cost. At this time, we do not anticipate major mobilization to secure passage.
- **China:** U.S. policy with China has been in the news and will be prominent in the election. The decision to end the Peace Corps program has been an item of note. Most recently the House of Representatives, citing past appropriations language requiring the agency to notify Congress about closure decisions, states that no funds in the Peace Corps budget should be used to permanently close the China program. Meanwhile, 2019 legislation introduced by Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) (S. 2320) includes language that called for the closure of the China program. **We are providing a link to a recent opinion piece you can share, written by China evacuee Reed Piercy that you can share to provide a perspective on the type and important work of China Peace Corps Volunteers.**
- **Peace Corps Independence:** Senator Scott's legislation also proposes placing Peace Corps under the authority of the State Department. While this proposal is a serious concern there has been no movement towards this bill advancing and passing.
- **Funding Cut Legislation:** In response to the original pandemic stimulus legislation, Congressman Jeff Duncan (R-SC) introduced legislation (H.R. 6657) that called for taking back various funds, including the \$88 million allocated for Peace Corps. While the bill secured ten original co-sponsors, there has been no further progress and there is little likelihood this bill will gain further momentum.
- **Respect for Peace Corps Volunteers Act:** This bill (H.R. 1411) introduced by Congressman Albio Sires (D-NJ) would allow the Peace Corps symbol to be an allowed use at gravesites or in death notices. The text of this legislation is included in other bills, including H.R. 3456 and H.R. 6833.

Appendix

Links to documents you can download and share with Congressional Offices.

Here is a list of documents you can review as you prepare for your meetings, and which you can download and share (as appropriate) with the people you are meeting.

Peace Corps Funding

- [Peace Corps' Domestic Dividend](#)

Peace Corps COVID-19 Legislation

- [H.R. 6833](#)
- [H.R. 6560](#)
- [S. 3700](#)
- [S. 3642](#)

CORPS Act

- [S. 3964](#)

Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2019

- [H.R. 3456](#)
- [HR 3456 Leave Behind Document](#)
- [Testimonies on Disability Pay](#)

Menstrual Equity in the Peace Corps Act

- [H.R. 6118](#)

Peace Corps China Program

- [China Evacuee Reed Piercy Opinion: "Why Peace Corps's presence in China was good for the U.S." *Washington Examiner* 7/23/20](#)