



April 26, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write to you today as a bipartisan, unified group of former directors of the Peace Corps to express our full support for a revitalized Peace Corps, one that advances our nation's critical foreign policy goal of world peace through international cooperation and service. We believe that now is the right time for the Peace Corps to build back better than it ever was before.

We therefore call on you and your administration to commit to raising the number of Peace Corps Volunteers in the field to a sustained level of 15,000 over the next decade, beginning by increasing the agency's annual budget to \$600 million by FY 2025. This funding level would support our five-year goal of 10,000 volunteers, consistent with bipartisan reauthorization legislation currently advancing in both chambers of Congress. Your support for this long overdue goal would galvanize the American peoples' spirit of service and international engagement that the Peace Corps represents. Previous presidents, both Democrats and Republicans, have endorsed doubling the size of the Peace Corps. Now is the time to fulfill that promise.

As you are aware, more than 240,000 Americans have joined the Peace Corps over the past 60 years, cumulatively serving in 142 countries and providing well over three billion hours of service to our nation and the world. Yet due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, there are currently no Peace Corps Volunteers serving abroad today. Such a situation does untold damage to our strong community-based worldwide presence and the United States' image abroad. We must send our volunteers back to the field as soon as possible, and we believe you will have strong backing to do so. There is overwhelming support from all host countries for the return of volunteers. They see the history of volunteers joining in public health campaigns to eradicate smallpox, polio, and measles as evidence that the Peace Corps can play a vital role in confronting today's pandemic as well as the long-lasting consequences of COVID-19 in our partner nations.

Throughout our decades of bipartisan leadership of the Peace Corps, we benefitted from deep bipartisan congressional support for the agency. We served both Republican and Democratic presidents and understood, as you do, that the Peace Corps is an American innovation, not a partisan one. When Americans volunteer abroad, they are not seen as Democrats or Republicans; they are seen as Americans.

That is why we are encouraged by renewed bipartisan leadership in Congress to maintain that bipartisan tradition for the Peace Corps. New legislation, the *Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2021* (H.R. 1456), which has been introduced by Representatives John Garamendi (D-CA) and

Garret Graves (R-LA), will advance the policy goals we seek. We call on you to fully support this legislation, as well as the anticipated Senate companion legislation, so that it can be quickly sent to your desk for your signature into law.

This bill is visionary. It creates a clear blueprint for the agency's future, one that we all share, to ramp up volunteer numbers to meet the tremendous challenges faced by our international partners while facilitating the American peoples' reengagement with the world. Critical reforms are included in the bill that reflect the longstanding requests of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer community. These include enhancements to the provision of health care, with special attention to women's health and safety; mental health care; readjustment allowance; volunteer security; whistleblower protections; and post-service hiring opportunities.

The bill's provisions demonstrate that Congress is listening to the Peace Corps community, which provided significant input into the bill, ensuring a better experience for the volunteer, agency, and host country. Your support for the bill's vision and policy prescriptions will show the Peace Corps community that you, too, understand their needs and support their hopes for a renewed Peace Corps.

In closing: Now is the time, under your leadership, to take a bold stroke to renew the original promise of the Peace Corps expressed in 1960 by President John F. Kennedy when he called upon young Americans to dedicate themselves to the cause of peace and friendship. We honor that vision and the vigorous support that all his successors have provided. We hope that in the days ahead, you, given your longstanding support for the Peace Corps, will join them in advocating for a reimagined, reshaped, and retooled Peace Corps for a changed world.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Crow (1973-74)
Nixon Administration

Richard Celeste (1979-81)
Carter Administration

Elaine Chao (1991-92)
Bush Administration

Carol Bellamy (1993-95)
Clinton Administration

Mark Gearan (1995-99)
Clinton Administration

Mark Schneider (1999-2001)
Clinton Administration

Gaddi Vasquez (2002-06)
Bush Administration

Ronald Tschetter (2006-09)
Bush Administration

Aaron Williams (2009-12)
Obama Administration

Carrie Hessler-Radelet (2014-17)
Obama Administration

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