

Importance of In-state tuition for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers at Maryland public colleges and universities.

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As a resident of Silver Spring, MD, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) Tunisia, the 20th Peace Corps Director (2018-2021), and a former Professor of Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), I strongly urge your support for passage of Senate Bill 050 (and House companion Bill 087). If approved and signed into law, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers would be treated the same as military personnel, Americorps volunteers, and others who are exempt from the residency requirement upon returning to Maryland and seeking in-state tuition to further their education.

Many other Maryland RPCVs have already written your committee about the impact of the Peace Corps on their lives here in Maryland and on the communities in which they live and work. As has been stated by others, since 1961, more than 6,500 Maryland residents have been among the nearly quarter million individuals who have served our nation as Peace Corps Volunteers, working to advance peace, friendship, understanding, and collaborative assistance in 142 foreign countries. In addition, the RPCV groups representing Maryland and the DC metropolitan area are the biggest in the country, demonstrating the significant number giving back to their communities in this area.

I want to focus on the positive impact this legislation can have on the State of Maryland from the perspective of my eight year professorship at UMB. The Schools of Social Work and Nursing, UMB, have approved Peace Corps Fellows programs for RPCVs earning Masters Degrees in these professional fields. During my time on campus, I worked actively to recruit returning RPCVs to these programs. During my tenure, the School of Social Work had between ten and twenty RPCV social work graduate students a year. Those who came to the school worked and lived in Baltimore during their two years of study, and then almost half began their professional careers in the area and settled into personal and professional lives in the state. Thus, the Maryland educational institutions drew them to the state and then their follow-on professional opportunities encouraged them to stay as tax paying Maryland residents. I, myself, came from the Peace Corps to Maryland for my Masters in Social Work (1970 – 1972) at UMB. I stayed and have been a Maryland resident for 55 years.

In addition to the longer term contributions being made by RPCVs, these students offer faculty, the schools, and other students their experience and perspectives while in school. SSW faculty, knowing my own background, would stop me in the hall to say how they value their RPCVs' contributions to the classroom, to their field placements in the City and County, and to curriculum development. Faculty (three who were also RPCVs) noted they offered language, cultural, and ethnic diversity of experience and leadership to discussions.

Why this legislation is important

Many potential students deciding on a graduate school after Peace Corps have limited resources. As others have noted, returning Volunteers get only \$8,000 in readjustment allowance after their two years of service. Tuition costs are an inhibitor to graduate education, and Volunteers researching degree programs during overseas service and afterward, look to cost when making this important decision. Potential students have frequently told me they chose other state schools where in-state tuition was offered even though they would have preferred Maryland schools.

In-state tuition will attract significantly more RPCVs to Maryland colleges and Universities, many of whom then stay and contribute to the state through their professional careers, community service, and economic stability.