

2024 NPCA Testimony on Maryland SB 0008.pdf

Uploaded by: Glenn Blumhorst

Position: FAV



20 F Street NW, 7th Floor Washington DC 20001
phone 202.293.7728 web PeaceCorpsConnect.org

The Next Step in Changing the World

January 25, 2024
SB 0008 – SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chairman Rosapepe, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

As President and CEO of the non-governmental, non-profit National Peace Corps Association (NPCA), I write to urge your support for passage of Senate Bill 0008 (State and Local Retirement and Pension Systems – Service Credit – Returned Peace Corps Volunteers).

This legislation would further enhance existing opportunities for state employees who served our nation in the Peace Corps to receive retirement credit for their Peace Corps service. If approved and signed into law, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) would be treated the same as military personnel to receive credit for their service.

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 143 foreign countries.

After serving for two (or in some cases, three or more) years overseas, RPCVs come home with a variety of skills and experiences that benefit our state and the communities where they reside. We are proud that the spirit of service to others remains a lifelong commitment for a vast majority of Peace Corps community members. Because of this, many of our members around the country continue their commitment to public service by working for the federal, state, or local government.

A 2021 nationwide survey of more than 4,000 RPCVs found that among the top five career choices following service was “public service, government, law, and policy.”

Furthermore, the survey found that “A majority of RPCVs reported that their Peace Corps experience enhanced their intercultural awareness (84 percent), resiliency (74 percent), problem-solving (53 percent), and communication skills (52 percent).” Seventy-four percent of those respondents reported having used their enhanced skills in their professional work, with many saying they applied those skills on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

Maryland is leading the nation when it comes to embracing the importance of service. The creation of a Department of Service and Innovation, coupled with Governor Moore’s 2023

establishment of the nation's first public service year option, are only the latest examples of our state's rich history and recognition of the importance of service, in its many forms.

For many, Peace Corps service results in a change in an RPCV's career path. A 2011 survey of the Peace Corps community found that at that time, a large number of volunteers who had served in the 2000s entered the fields of education and teaching, and health care.

However, Peace Corps service is a financial sacrifice. Volunteers who provide two years of service to our country are paid for their work while in service, but paid at a rate commensurate to that received by host country nationals. This results in most if not all of their income while in service being used to cover everyday expenses.

The Peace Corps does provide volunteers with a "readjustment" allowance, a payment that accumulates each month and is set aside for volunteers at the end of their service. Recent volunteers' readjustment pay amounted to roughly \$8,000. However, having been away from home for more than two years, these funds are needed for RPCVs to reestablish themselves as they prepare for the next step in their career path. This allowance is needed and used to cover everything from rent, transportation, health care and food, to new clothing, laptops, and cell phones. Additionally, many younger RPCVs also need to resume repayment of student loans.

The result of this is that RPCVs sacrifice at least two years of their careers, with very little – if any – financial benefit to show for it. For state employees, this financial sacrifice should be recognized with the highest possible support when it comes to benefits such as retirement credit.

For these reasons and more, I ask for your support of those Marylanders who continue to serve through employment in state government. Please make sure that Senate Bill 008 is reported favorably out of committee and approved by the Senate.

Sincerely,



Dan Baker – President and CEO
National Peace Corps Association
Bolivia 1999-2002; Timor-Leste 2002-03; Peace Corps Staff 2003-16
(resident of Silver Spring MD)

References:

- Peace Corps website (www.peacecorps.gov)
- *The Power of Peace Corps - The Domestic Benefit of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers* (Survey conducted by a National Peace Corps Association Task Force) March 2023
- *A Call to Peace - Perspectives of Volunteers on the Peace Corps at 50* (A report by Civic Enterprises and the National Peace Corps Association in partnership with Peter D. Hart Research Associates) September 2011

SB 8 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Jeff Bronow

Position: FAV

Good Afternoon,

I'd like to offer my support for Senate Bill 8. I appreciate Kathleen Ryan's initiation and advocacy of this bill, which would allow time served in the Peace Corps to be included in pension benefits without having to purchase the credit. The fact that a State employee is able to purchase the credit now for Peace Corps service indicates that such is recognized as a valuable public service. So it begs the question of why Peace Corps service needs to be purchased whereas military service does not. The Peace Corps has been an important and valuable national program for more than 60 years, offering Americans the opportunity to serve abroad to help people around the globe in many diverse ways.

As a returned Peace Corps Volunteer who has had the opportunity to serve as a teacher in the Fiji Islands from 1988 to 1990, I know firsthand the value the Peace Corps brings to other countries as well as to the United States. Peace Corps volunteers not only work in valuable programs and services around the globe but also learn about other peoples and cultures and bring that knowledge and experience back to the U.S., adding value to our own states and local jurisdictions and residents served thereof. Thank you for your consideration.

Jeff Bronow

Chief | Research Division | Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning
410.313.4370 | jbronow@howardcountymd.gov
3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, MD 21043 | [website](#)

Letters of Support-Senate Bill 8-Jingwi (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Kathleen Jingwi

Position: FAV

Letters in Support of Senate Bill 8

My name is Sarah Moenter, a 3rd grade special educator and one of only about 20 Lead Teachers employed by Baltimore City Public Schools this year. This is my 14th year in education, a vocation ignited through my AmeriCorps experience serving with City Year in Los Angeles. My passion for service and working to improve underserved communities through education carried me to Peace Corps service in Armenia, where I served as an English teacher in two primary schools, working with three counterparts and hundreds of students from 2014-2016. In addition to my classroom work, I developed grants to improve the schools' facilities, including the construction of a playground and new furniture to replace the dilapidated Soviet-era desks and chairs. I also founded an environmental education camp called GROW: Growing and Rejuvenating our World, which brought summer camps to villages around the country and continued to be run by local volunteers after my departure in 2016.

The skills and passions I developed in the Peace Corps, including cross-cultural communication, teaching of English to non-native speakers, grant writing, resourcefulness, and environmentalism have continued to inform my work in Baltimore City Schools, where I have been teaching since 2017. As a Lead Teacher, I provide coaching for novice teachers and manage schoolwide intervention programs to support students struggling with class performance and behavior. I have secured grants for my school this year to develop a science lab, an outdoor learning classroom, and a teachers' lounge. Teaching at a school with about 60% multilingual learners, I continue to utilize my training as an English teacher for non-native speakers to ensure my students are able to access the curriculum as well as build their communication skills. As the founder and co-facilitator of our school's Green Team, I manage the recycling program and lead an environmental club after-school for our students' 3rd-5th graders.

While my years of service, both through AmeriCorps and Peace Corps, had an incredible impact on my career in education and my personal development, they did not provide financially to my ability to purchase those years of service. As a volunteer in Armenia, I

made about \$300 per month, which was barely enough to provide for rent to my host family and food for the month, let alone put any aside for savings or to plan for my “life after Peace Corps”. Receiving these years towards my retirement would be a huge benefit to offset the delay in starting a salaried career through my volunteer service. This would also provide great incentive for other volunteers looking for post-service options to bring their skills to Maryland, where our students would certainly benefit from their diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Thank you for your consideration.

I am writing in support of SB 8, State and Local Retirement and Pension Systems - Service Credit - Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. I am a resident of Baltimore City, and I served in the Peace Corps from 1994-1996 in Mali, West Africa. The intent of SB 8 is to give Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) the same opportunity to receive Retirement Credit with the State of Maryland as the Military and National Guard.

Since returning from Peace Corps service, I have had many opportunities to work with students, and in many cases my Peace Corps service enhanced my ability to communicate with them about both the importance of intercultural interactions and about ways to better communicate with people from different countries and cultures. I feel strongly that my Peace Corps experience has made me better at working with students, and for that reason, I feel there is a real value to incentivizing RPCVs to work in Maryland's public schools. I would like to encourage all Maryland lawmakers to support this bill and ensure that more Maryland students can benefit from the extraordinary experience that Peace Corps offers to American citizens.

Sincerely,
Craig Tower
PC Mali, 1994-1996
Baltimore City, MD
craigtower@yahoo.com

I am writing this brief note in support of the SB 8 bill providing retirement service for the time spent as a Peace Corps Volunteer. 41% of all PCVs serve in the Education

sector. It is my understanding that both the Military and National Guard are entitled to this retirement plan in Maryland. And both the Military and National Guard claim their work makes America safer for Democracy. In my judgement Peace Corps Volunteers also can make the same claim. By working and living side by side around the world with host country nationals to achieve development and social welfare goals that they have identified as important demonstrates to host country nationals that we Americans care about them and their achievement of their goals. The friendships formed are deep and lasting and help to make America safer for all. The route is different from the Military and National Guard but the end result can be the same.

I encourage you to include Returned Peace Corps Volunteers in the Maryland retirement program. It makes good sense.

And thank you.

Sincerely,
Linda Miller Zenick
Rural Health Nurse Midwife
RPCV Borneo, Malaysia
1967-68

Dear Senator Washington,

I am writing to urge your support for SB 8, which would further enhance opportunities for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) who are Maryland state employees to secure retirement credit for Peace Corps service. I am a resident of University Park and I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mali from 1989 to 1991.

The intent of the Bill is to give RPCVs the same opportunity to receive Retirement Credit with the State of Maryland as the Military and National Guard.

Currently RPCVs can purchase their years of service at full cost, which is prohibitively expensive, especially as Peace Corps volunteers do not get paid a salary or receive retirement monies for their service.

Military, National Guard or Reserve, attendees of service academies, can all apply to receive credit for their years of service without purchasing those years. This bill intends to add Peace Corps Service to that list.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,
Craig Lamberton

I am urging support of MD Senate Bill 8. A decade ago, shortly following the end of my Peace Corps Service, I moved to Maryland. If I had the opportunity to buy into my service years, I might have pursued state government work. I was able to purchase my years toward federal service based on my stipend earnings which made it much more affordable. The intent of the Bill is to give Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (PRCV's) the same opportunity to receive Retirement Credit with the State of Maryland as the Military and National Guard which would make the State of Maryland government more competitive in recruiting former Peace Corps Volunteers.

Teena Curry
RPCV Madagascar 2010-2013

I have read about the bill allowing Maryland teachers to claim Peace Corps service years in calculating their retirement and I wholeheartedly support this effort. As a teacher for many year in parochial, independent, and public schools in Maryland and now as a recipient of a monthly Maryland pension, I appreciate how important this source of income is. After my service in Charles County Public Schools, I became the Director of World Wise Schools, the office of the Peace Corps which brings the Peace Corps experience to U.S. classrooms. In developing and publishing curriculum for our American students and arranging for returned Peace Corps Volunteers to visit American classrooms, I came to know many of these former Volunteers and understand that their service, while different from the military, is very important in fostering American ideals abroad and showcasing the best America has to offer. The knowledge that Peace Corps service is counted in Maryland as a valuable contribution toward retirement, as reflected in this bill, would also encourage talented and experienced future teachers to apply to Maryland schools at a time when there is a real teacher shortage.

Sincerely,
Eileen M. Mattingly
Teacher and Former Director of World Wise Schools

(Additionally, a number of individuals added their name to this statement)

Peace Corps Volunteers serve our nation with distinction, and bring back experiences and skills that benefit our communities and our classrooms. Please show your support for this service by passing Senate Bill 008. Please make sure Marylanders who serve in the Peace Corps are supported the same as others who serve our nation.

Joshua Davis
Prince George's County Public Schools
The International High School at Largo
Peace Corps Ukraine 2011-2013

Katie Shanks
Baltimore City Public Schools
Mozambique 2019-pandemic 2020

Becky Boltz Taylor
Montgomery County Public Schools
Ethiopia 98-99/China 00-02

Kimberly Jones
Baltimore City Public Schools
Timor-Leste 19-20

Sean Michael Emyrs Canterbury
Baltimore City Public Schools
Ecuador 2019-pandemic 2020

Jillian Cordova
Former Maryland State Government
Peru 2020-2012

Karen Winchester Delrio
Baltimore County Public Schools
Paraguay 95-97

Amy Barry
Prince George's County-Private School Teacher
Paraguay 82-83

Ab Bear

Anne Arundel County-Private School Teacher
Togo 89,91

Senate Bill 8 Rationale-Jingwi.pdf

Uploaded by: Kathleen Jingwi

Position: FAV

Oral Testimony from Kathleen Jingwi in Support of Senate Bill 8

Hi, My name is Kathleen Ryan Jingwi and I am a High School Mathematics teacher at Bowie HS in Prince George's County. I am in my 33rd year of teaching. I started teaching in the Peace Corps in Cameroon (90-93), and then taught in Detroit for 6 years (starting as a Peace Corps Fellow) before returning to Maryland, my home state, where I am in my 21st year of teaching in Maryland Public Schools. In researching retirement from Maryland public schools, I discovered that I could purchase my years in Michigan and in the Peace Corps, but with no difference in cost between the two. While in Michigan, I received pension money that could be used towards the purchase of my previous service. As a Peace Corps volunteer, I received no such money. When I spoke with the Maryland Department of Education, I learned that I would have to purchase the Peace Corps years at the full value of the years, not as a percentage of what I was paid. In Maryland's own words on Form 26, this is prohibitively expensive.

As a public school teacher, with three children, I have lived modestly yet with no real savings to speak of. I don't know how I would ever have money to purchase the years that I was in the Peace Corps. As part of my research, I discovered form 43 "Claim of Retirement for Military Service". Employees can receive up to 5 years towards their retirement after completing this form, for inactive duty in the National Guard, active duty in any reserve unit, or active duty in the armed forces. I thought, why not also include Peace Corps Service?

As a returned Peace Corps Volunteer, we bring unique skills to the table wherever we are employed, whether in the classroom or elsewhere. Learning to live in a foreign country and respect the traditions and values of others brings a different perspective. As Peace Corps Volunteers, we swear an oath to Support and Defend the Constitution of the United States and are often the only Americans that people in our host countries come in contact with. Peace Corps helps "promote better mutual understanding between Americans and citizens of other countries".

When we return to the US, many RPCV teachers teach in the most challenging school districts. I myself, in addition to teaching in Detroit, also have taught Newcomer Algebra 1 to students who had recently arrived in the US with limited English skills. I served as the Math Department chair in my high school in Prince George's County for 15 years. During that time I started a Math Club which became a chapter of Mu Alpha Theta. I initiated peer Math tutoring, which continued when I left the school and remains in place to this day. My experience in the Peace Corps continues to help me be a better teacher.

Paragraph for Senator: Description of Intent of Bill

The intent of the Bill is to give Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (PRCV's) the same opportunity to receive Retirement Credit with the State of Maryland as the Military and National Guard.

Currently RPCV/s can purchase their years of service at full cost, which is prohibitively expensive, especially as Peace Corps volunteers do not get paid a salary or receive retirement monies for their service.

Military, National Guard or Reserve, attendees of service academies, can all apply to receive credit for their years of service without purchasing those years. This bill intends to add Peace Corps Service to that list.