

# Support the Peace Corps Equity Act of 2014 (H.R. 4578/S.2291)

## End the Ban on Abortion Coverage for Peace Corps Volunteers in Cases of Life Endangerment, Rape, and Incest

Every year, over 8,000 people serve in the Peace Corps, venturing to far-flung regions of the world to give their time and energy doing the important work of advancing U.S. interests in developing countries.<sup>i</sup> Peace Corps volunteers sacrifice the comforts of home, and at times their health and safety, while serving their country abroad to carry the U.S.'s message and work to improve education, fight malnutrition, and strengthen communities.

Since 1979, however, Congress has prohibited the Peace Corps from providing coverage for abortion services in their health care program *with no exception*. Even the allowances for abortion coverage in cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment that are found in other federal abortion restrictions are withheld from women serving in the Peace Corps. This is the case despite the fact that volunteers often serve in countries where safe and reliable medical care may be hard to come by, and that women in the Peace Corps unfortunately face a heightened risk of sexual assault.<sup>ii</sup>

The **Peace Corps Equity Act** would ensure that volunteers have abortion coverage in cases of life endangerment, rape, and incest—like other women who get their health insurance through the federal government.

**The ban on abortion coverage for Peace Corps volunteers, even in cases of rape and life endangerment, is at odds with federal policy for other insurance programs.**

The federal bans on abortion coverage for federal employees, women serving in the military, women who qualify for Medicaid, and others, all include exceptions for instances where a woman's life is in jeopardy or where she becomes pregnant as a result of sexual assault.

In fact, just last year Congress approved the defense authorization bill that included a provision that extends abortion coverage to servicewomen and military dependents who become pregnant as a result of rape or incest.<sup>iii</sup> That provision had bipartisan support in both the House and Senate.<sup>iv</sup>

Women serving in the Peace Corps—some 60% of all Peace Corps volunteers<sup>v</sup>—are singled out for inequitable treatment.

There is no rational basis for denying Peace Corps volunteers the same level of abortion coverage that is extended to others—including the Peace Corps employees who work with these volunteers.

**All women deserve access to comprehensive reproductive health care.**

If a woman chooses to carry her pregnancy to term, the Peace Corps provides coverage for her necessary medical care. But if the same woman needs to end her pregnancy, the

Peace Corps cannot provide coverage for her abortion.

The ACLU believes that every woman should have the comprehensive reproductive health care coverage she needs, and that all of the bans on insurance coverage for abortion should be repealed in their entirety. But at the very least, Peace Corps volunteers deserve the same access to care as other women in federal service.

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Congress should act now to pass the Peace Corps Equity Act of 2013, lift the ban on abortion coverage in cases of life, rape, and incest, and end the inequitable treatment of Peace Corps volunteers.

**The women of the Peace Corps deserve more from the country they serve.**

For more info, please contact Vania Leveille, Senior Legislative Counsel.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup>PEACE CORPS, FACT SHEET 1 (2011), *available at* [http://multimedia.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/about/pc\\_facts.pdf](http://multimedia.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/about/pc_facts.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup>Sheryl Gay Stolberg, *Peace Corps Volunteers Speak Out on Rape*, N.Y. TIMES, May 11, 2011, at A16.

<sup>iii</sup>Editorial, *A Barrier Drops for Military Women*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 4, 2012, at A16.

<sup>iv</sup>Press Release, Office of U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Shaheen Leads Bipartisan, Bicameral Group in Support of Provision to Protect Servicewomen (Dec. 5 2012), *available at* <http://www.shaheen.senate.gov/news/press/release/?id=f998f0b8-8350-41e7-a96f-a84448b2e470>.

<sup>v</sup>PEACE CORPS, FACT SHEET at 1.