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The Next Step in Changing the World

October 20, 2015

The Honorable James Timilty, Chair  
The Honorable James Murphy, Chair  
Joint Committee on Public Service  
State House; Room 156  
Boston, MA 02113

Dear Chairman Timilty, Chairman Murphy, and Members of the Joint Committee on Public Service,

As the national non-profit organization representing the Peace Corps community, I am pleased to submit this **statement of support for House Bill 2384**, an act authorizing certain public employees' creditable retirement service, filed by Representative James O'Day. This legislation would extend creditable retirement service for all eligible Massachusetts state employees who served our nation as Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs), and in other similar volunteer organizations.

As a state rich in Peace Corps history – beginning with John F. Kennedy's 1961 Executive Order creating the agency – Massachusetts can be equally proud when it became one of the early states to honor and recognize Peace Corps Volunteers by offering retirement credit to classroom teachers in 2003.

Since then, a number of other states have followed – or in many instances surpassed – Massachusetts leadership on this issue. In 2007, the National Peace Corps Association conducted a nationwide review of state retirement credit programs. At that time, we found that twenty-two states offer some form of retirement credit for Peace Corps service. **Fourteen of these states reported offering retirement credit to all state employees<sup>1</sup>, including the neighboring states of Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont.**

There are several additional reasons why we support passage of this legislation:

- **Specific Skills that Benefit the People of Massachusetts:** The legislature has already recognized that Peace Corps teachers who come home to continue working in Massachusetts classrooms have skills that benefit local communities. Today's Peace Corps trains and engages volunteers in other programs that are also beneficial. Nearly one in four currently serving PCVs are engaged in critically important global health initiatives, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative. Twelve percent of today's PCVs are trained to address key environmental challenges ranging from water/soil conservation to combating deforestation to promoting alternative energy. Meanwhile, nearly one in five PCVs list Community/Economic Development or Youth Development as their primary Peace Corps assignment. **All of these program areas correspond directly to key services your state offers the citizens of Massachusetts.**

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<sup>1</sup> States reporting retirement credit for all state employees included AZ, CA, CO, IA, KS, KY, ME, MD, MT, OH, RI, SC, VT and VA


- **Other Skills:** Along with skills that directly relate to a vocation, Peace Corps Volunteers bring many other tangible and intangible skills to employers who hire them. In an increasingly multi-cultural environment, PCVs come home with significant language skills and cross-cultural understanding. Given the circumstances of their service, PCVs also possess traits that are extremely helpful to any employer. PCVs are highly collaborative with the ability to multi-task and deal with ambiguity. Due to the nature of their service, they are required to be flexible and resourceful. **These positive skill sets benefit any state employee and those working with them.**
- **Equity:** Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) are proudly serving the people of Massachusetts as employees in many state agencies. They devote the same amount of energy, passion and dedication as RPCV teachers or others who receive retirement credit for other forms of service to our nation. We believe that all state employees who served in the Peace Corps deserve equitable treatment with others across the spectrum of state agencies in receiving retirement credit.
- **Good Citizens:** With neighboring states offering benefits commensurate to House Bill 2384, Massachusetts should seek to ensure that RPCVs stay in-state, not only because of their work skills but also because of their civic contributions and community leadership. This was borne out in a 2011 national survey of the Peace Corps community. Conducted by Peter Hart Associates<sup>2</sup>, this survey of more than 11,000 RPCVs found, among other things, that: a) RPCVs volunteer in their communities at twice the national average; b) 86 percent of respondents said Peace Corps service made them more open to people of different races, ethnicities and religions; c) 52 percent of respondents said Peace Corps service makes them feel more optimistic about the future.

Peace Corps Volunteers are citizen-diplomats who represent our nation and earn respect and admiration within communities where they serve. We hope and expect you share our admiration for the roughly 200 currently serving PCVs from Massachusetts, and the more than 8,000 Bay State citizens who served in the Peace Corps since 1961.

We hope you will pass House Bill 2384, to ensure that all RPCVs working for the state of Massachusetts are recognized for their service to our nation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Glenn Blumhorst – President  
National Peace Corps Association

CC: Representative James O'Day

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<sup>2</sup> A Call to Peace – Perspectives of Volunteers on the Peace Corps at 50, September 2011