

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To mobilize individuals in the United States in the fight against coronavirus by expanding volunteer opportunities in AmeriCorps, expanding employment opportunities at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and utilizing the expertise of Peace Corps volunteer leaders whose service ended on March 15, 2020, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. VAN HOLLEN (for Mr. MARKEY, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. BLUMENTHAL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To mobilize individuals in the United States in the fight against coronavirus by expanding volunteer opportunities in AmeriCorps, expanding employment opportunities at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and utilizing the expertise of Peace Corps volunteer leaders whose service ended on March 15, 2020, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Undertaking National
3 Initiatives to Tackle Epidemic Act of 2020” or the
4 “UNITE Act of 2020”.

5 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

6 Congress makes the following findings:

7 (1) The outbreak of the novel coronavirus,
8 SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID–19 (referred to
9 in this Act as the “coronavirus”), has disrupted the
10 lives of all individuals in the United States and re-
11 quired enormous sacrifice. In following the guidance
12 of public health officials, individuals in the United
13 States have and can continue to play a key role in
14 defeating their common, invisible enemy.

15 (2) The Corporation for National and Commu-
16 nity Service (referred to in this Act as “CNCS”),
17 through the health, disaster, and poverty services
18 administered by the CNCS under the 3 flagship
19 AmeriCorps programs (AmeriCorps VISTA,
20 AmeriCorps NCCC, and AmeriCorps State and Na-
21 tional Volunteers), is uniquely positioned to aid
22 frontline workers and communities most impacted by
23 the coronavirus public health emergency if the Presi-
24 dent of the United States fully mobilizes those 3
25 programs.

1 (3) The Federal Emergency Management Agen-
2 cy (referred to in this section as “FEMA”), tasked
3 with leading aspects of the whole-of-government re-
4 sponse to the coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly
5 understaffed of those frontline workers that are es-
6 sential to responding to the public health emergency.

7 (4) On March 15, 2020, the Peace Corps invol-
8 untarily ended the service of approximately 7,300
9 volunteers. Many of them acquired public health
10 skills in countries abroad, which may also be applied
11 to further service in AmeriCorps, service in FEMA,
12 or continuing service in the Peace Corps once oper-
13 ations of the Peace Corps are to resume.

14 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF THE SENATE.**

15 It is the sense of the Senate that—

16 (1) the President should fully utilize the com-
17 petencies of the Federal Government workforce to
18 battle the outbreak of coronavirus, the worst global
19 health emergency the United States has faced in a
20 century, as well as make available expanded opportu-
21 nities for individuals in the United States desiring to
22 serve their country in its time of need;

23 (2) the President should elevate the role of
24 CNCS within the whole-of-government response to

1 the coronavirus outbreak, including by urging its
2 Chief Executive Officer to—

3 (A) take steps to actively encourage vol-
4 unteerism and specifically encourage individuals
5 in the United States to serve as volunteers in
6 AmeriCorps programs;

7 (B) prioritize AmeriCorps grants that pro-
8 vide assistance to those most impacted by the
9 coronavirus public health emergency and recruit
10 the maximum number of volunteers authorized
11 by law, particularly focusing on the recently un-
12 employed; and

13 (C) provide State Commissions, as defined
14 in section 101 of the National and Community
15 Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12511), with
16 the flexibility to award and amend grants and
17 to remove undue burdens relating to the
18 onboarding of volunteers;

19 (3) the United States should expand the Cadre
20 of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE)
21 program, administered by the Federal Emergency
22 Management Agency, to enlist individuals in the
23 United States to solve public health and supply-man-
24 agement challenges related to the coronavirus out-

1 break, as well as challenges related to wildfires, hur-
2 ricanes, and other disasters; and

3 (4) bolstering the number full-time positions at
4 the Federal Emergency Management Agency will
5 also expand national service opportunities for quali-
6 fied individuals in the United States who have be-
7 come unemployed or underemployed as a result of
8 the coronavirus outbreak, including the approxi-
9 mately 7,300 Peace Corps volunteers whose service
10 ended on March 15, 2020.

11 **SEC. 4. MOBILIZING PROGRAMS IN THE CORONAVIRUS**
12 **PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.**

13 (a) **PRIORITIZING CERTAIN AGREEMENTS.—**

14 (1) **IN GENERAL.—**Notwithstanding any provi-
15 sion of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973
16 (42 U.S.C. 4950 et seq.) or the National and Com-
17 munity Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12501 et
18 seq.), the Chief Executive Officer of CNCS, in con-
19 sultation with the Secretary of Health and Human
20 Services, the Director of the Centers for Disease
21 Control and Prevention, the Administrator of the
22 Federal Emergency Management Agency, State gov-
23 ernments, and State Commissions, as defined in sec-
24 tion 101 of the National and Community Service Act
25 of 1990, shall, for the period described in paragraph

1 (2), prioritize existing agreements, or enter into new
2 agreements, with public and private nonprofit orga-
3 nizations, that will direct volunteers in programs ad-
4 ministered by CNCS to assignments that assist indi-
5 viduals most impacted by the coronavirus public
6 health emergency, including assignments—

7 (A) providing support services to veterans,
8 homeless populations, the elderly, and other in-
9 dividuals who may be most vulnerable during
10 the coronavirus public health emergency;

11 (B) supporting health care professionals
12 and related positions;

13 (C) offering before- and after-school tutor-
14 ing and instruction for children in low-income
15 areas, and offering adult basic skills and lit-
16 eracy tutoring and instruction, including
17 through remote learning;

18 (D) expanding broadband infrastructure
19 for underserved and rural communities;

20 (E) performing functions consistent with
21 implementation of the decennial census; and

22 (F) performing other functions consistent
23 with addressing the coronavirus public health
24 emergency, including assisting with testing and
25 contact tracing.

1 (2) PERIOD.—The period described in this
2 paragraph—

3 (A) shall begin on the date of enactment of
4 this Act; and

5 (B) shall end—

6 (i) not earlier than the date of the
7 conclusion of the coronavirus public health
8 emergency; and

9 (ii) not later than 2 years after the
10 conclusion of such emergency; and

11 (b) AUTHORIZATION FOR ADDITIONAL RECRUIT-
12 MENT OF AMERICORPS VOLUNTEERS.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—

14 (A) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF POSI-
15 TIONS.—Section 121(f)(1)(B) of the National
16 and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C.
17 12571(f)(1)(B)) is amended—

18 (i) in clause (vi), by striking “and” at
19 the end;

20 (ii) in clause (vii), by adding “and” at
21 the end; and

22 (iii) by adding at the end the fol-
23 lowing:

24 “(viii) 500,000 for each of fiscal years
25 2020 through 2022;”.

1 (B) REAUTHORIZATIONS.—

2 (i) AMERICORPS VISTA.—Section
3 501(a)(1) of the Domestic Volunteer Serv-
4 ice Act of 1973 (42 U.S.C. 5081(a)(1)) is
5 amended by striking “\$100,000,000 for
6 fiscal year 2010 and such sums as may be
7 necessary for each of the fiscal years 2011
8 through 2014” and inserting “such sums
9 as may be necessary for each of fiscal
10 years 2020 through 2022”.

11 (ii) AMERICORPS NCCC.—Section
12 501(a)(1)(A) of the National and Commu-
13 nity Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C.
14 12681(a)(1)(A)) is amended—

15 (I) by striking clauses (i) and
16 (ii); and

17 (II) by striking “title I—” and
18 inserting “title I, such sums as may
19 be necessary for each of fiscal years
20 2020 through 2022.”.

21 (iii) AMERICORPS STATE AND NA-
22 TIONAL VOLUNTEERS.—Section 501(a)(2)
23 of the National and Community Service
24 Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12681(a)(2)) is

1 amended by striking “2010 through 2014”
2 and inserting “2020 through 2022”.

3 (2) REQUIREMENT.—To fulfill the purposes of
4 subsection (a), the Chief Executive Officer of CNCS
5 shall expedite the recruitment and selection of volun-
6 teers for an assignment described in subsection (a)
7 who are—

8 (A) unemployed veterans;

9 (B) individuals who become unemployed or
10 underemployed as a result of the coronavirus
11 public health emergency; and

12 (C) AmeriCorps members, Peace Corps
13 volunteers, and United States Fulbright schol-
14 ars, who have had their service ended as a re-
15 sult of such emergency.

16 (3) ELIGIBILITY.—

17 (A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any
18 other provision of law—

19 (i) any individual who is authorized to
20 work in the United States, including any
21 individual granted Deferred Action for
22 Childhood Arrivals (DACA) pursuant to
23 the program announced by the Secretary
24 of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012,
25 and any individual granted Temporary

1 Protected Status pursuant to section
2 244(a)(1) of the Immigration and Nation-
3 ality Act (8 U.S.C. 1254a(a)(1)), may not
4 be disqualified from being recruited or se-
5 lected for any assignment described in sub-
6 section (a) based solely on his or her citi-
7 zenship or immigration status; and

8 (ii) any individual who has filed for
9 bankruptcy, or who has a poor credit rat-
10 ing, determined by the Chief Executive Of-
11 ficer of CNCS to be the result of the
12 coronavirus public health emergency may
13 not be disqualified from being recruited or
14 selected for any assignment described in
15 subsection (a) based solely on such bank-
16 ruptcy or credit reporting.

17 (B) CLARIFICATION.—No individual de-
18 scribed in clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (A)
19 who is recruited or selected for an assignment
20 described in subsection (a) shall become dis-
21 qualified from continuing to serve in such as-
22 signment after the expiration of the period de-
23 scribed in subsection (a)(2) solely on the basis
24 of his or her citizenship or immigration status,
25 bankruptcy status, or credit score.

1 (c) BRIEFING TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 30
2 days after the date of enactment of this Act, and every
3 180 days thereafter through fiscal year 2022, the Chief
4 Executive Officer of CNCS shall submit a report, to the
5 Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of
6 the Senate and the Committee on Education and Labor
7 of the House of Representatives, on the operating plan of
8 the CNCS to carry out subsections (a) and (b), including
9 the amendments under subsection (b).

10 (d) ENHANCED STIPEND.—Section 105(b)(2)(A) of
11 the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (42 U.S.C.
12 4955(b)(2)(A)) is amended to read as follows:

13 “(A) beginning for fiscal year 2020, the min-
14 imum allowance is not less than an amount equal to
15 200 percent of the income official poverty line (as
16 defined by the Office of Management and Budget,
17 and revised annually in accordance with section
18 673(2) of the Community Services Block Grant Act
19 (42 U.S.C. 9902(2))) applicable to a family of 1;
20 and”.

21 (e) CEILING ON STIPEND FOR GRANTEES.—Section
22 189 of the National and Community Service Act of 1990
23 (42 U.S.C. 12645c) is amended—

24 (1) in subsection (a), by striking “\$18,000”
25 and inserting “\$25,000”; and

1 (2) in subsection (e)(1), by striking “\$19,500”
2 and inserting “\$30,000”.

3 (f) **WAIVER OF MATCHING FUNDS REQUIRE-**
4 **MENTS.**—Section 189A of the National and Community
5 Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12645d) is amended—

6 (1) in the section heading, by inserting “;
7 **MATCHING FUNDS DURING CORONAVIRUS PUB-**
8 **LIC HEALTH EMERGENCY**” after “**COMMU-**
9 **NITIES**”;

10 (2) by redesignating subsection (b) as sub-
11 section (c); and

12 (3) by inserting after subsection (a) the fol-
13 lowing:

14 “(b) **COVID–19 RESPONSE.**—Notwithstanding any
15 other provision of law, an entity that receives assistance
16 from the Corporation for any program under the national
17 service laws (including a State Commission and an entity
18 receiving subgrant funds) during the coronavirus public
19 health emergency, as defined in section 4(g) of the Under-
20 taking National Initiatives to Tackle Epidemic Act of
21 2020, shall not be subject to any requirements to provide
22 matching funds for any such program, and the Federal
23 share of such assistance for a recipient (including for a
24 State Commission and a subgrant recipient) may be 100
25 percent.”.

1 (g) CORONAVIRUS PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DE-
2 FINED.—In this section, the term “coronavirus public
3 health emergency” means the public health emergency de-
4 clared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services
5 under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act (42
6 U.S.C. 247d) on January 31, 2020, with respect to
7 COVID–19.

8 **SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION FOR SURGE CAPACITY FOR FED-**
9 **ERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—For fiscal years 2020 through
11 2022 and subject to the appropriation of funds, the Ad-
12 ministrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agen-
13 cy shall appoint, administer, and expedite the training of
14 an additional 62,000 Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery
15 Employees, under the Response and Recover Directorate
16 (referred to in this section as “CORE employees”) under
17 the Office of Response and Recovery, above the level of
18 such employees in fiscal year 2019, to address the
19 coronavirus public health emergency and other disasters
20 and public emergencies.

21 (b) DETAIL OF CORE EMPLOYEES.—A CORE em-
22 ployee may be detailed, through mutual agreement and on
23 a non-reimbursable basis, to any Federal agency or to a
24 State, local, or Tribal government to fulfill an assignment
25 consistent with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and

1 Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.) and
2 emergency work (as defined in section 206.225 of title 44,
3 Code of Federal Regulations, or any successor thereto),
4 including—

5 (1) providing logistical support for the supply
6 chain of medical equipment and other goods involved
7 in COVID–19 response efforts;

8 (2) facilitating COVID–19 testing and surveil-
9 lance activities;

10 (3) tracing contacts of infected individuals and
11 the status of the individuals while being quar-
12 antined;

13 (4) providing nutritional assistance to vulner-
14 able populations; and

15 (5) carrying out other disaster preparedness
16 and response functions for other emergencies and
17 natural disasters.

18 (c) REQUIREMENT.—As soon as feasible, the Admin-
19 istrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency
20 shall make public job announcements to fill the CORE em-
21 ployee positions authorized under subsection (a), which
22 shall prioritize hiring from among the following groups of
23 individuals:

24 (1) Unemployed veterans of the Armed Forces.

1 (2) Individuals who have become unemployed or
2 underemployed as a result of the coronavirus public
3 health emergency.

4 (3) AmeriCorps members, Peace Corps Volun-
5 teers, and United States Fulbright Scholars who
6 have had their service terms ended as a result of the
7 coronavirus public health emergency.

8 (4) Recent graduates of public health, medical,
9 nursing, social work, or related health-services pro-
10 grams.

11 (d) **HIRING.**—The Administrator of the Federal
12 Emergency Management Agency shall—

13 (1) hire the employees authorized under this
14 section in accordance with section 306(b)(1) of the
15 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency
16 Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5149(b)(1)); and

17 (2) use relevant statutory authority in effect on
18 the day before the date of enactment of this Act to
19 allow regional offices and site managers to advertise
20 for and hire employees under this section.

21 (e) **TRAINING.**—The Administrator of the Federal
22 Emergency Management Agency may make appropriate
23 adjustments to the standard training course curriculum
24 for employees under this section to include on-site
25 trainings at regional offices of the Federal Emergency

1 Management Agency, virtual trainings, or trainings con-
2 ducted by other Federal, State, local, or Tribal agencies
3 to fulfill functions described in subsection (b).

4 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
5 are authorized to be appropriated to the Administrator of
6 the Federal Emergency Management Agency
7 \$6,500,000,000, for each of fiscal years 2020, 2021, and
8 2022, of which not less than \$1,500,000,000 shall be used
9 each fiscal year for the administrative costs associated
10 with carrying out this section.

11 (g) ELIGIBILITY FOR HIRING.—For the purposes of
12 hiring employees under this section—

13 (1) any individual who is authorized to work in
14 the United States, including any individual granted
15 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) pur-
16 suant to the program announced by the Secretary of
17 Homeland Security on June 15, 2012, and any indi-
18 vidual granted Temporary Protected Status pursu-
19 ant to section 244(a)(1) of the Immigration and Na-
20 tionality Act (8 U.S.C. 1254a(a)(1)), may not be
21 disqualified from being hired as an employee under
22 this section based solely on his or her citizenship or
23 immigration status; and

24 (2) any individual who has filed bankruptcy, or
25 who has a poor credit rating, determined the Admin-

1 istrator of the Federal Emergency Management
2 Agency to be a result of the coronavirus public
3 health emergency may not be disqualified from being
4 hired as an employee under this section based solely
5 on such bankruptcy or credit rating.

6 (h) CORONAVIRUS PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY
7 DEFINED.—In this section, the term “coronavirus public
8 health emergency” has the meaning given the term in sec-
9 tion 4(g).

10 **SEC. 6. PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER REENROLLMENT ELIGI-**
11 **BILITY AND TRANSITION ASSISTANCE.**

12 (a) ASSISTANCE FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS
13 WHOSE SERVICE ENDED INVOLUNTARILY.—Notwith-
14 standing section 5 of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C.
15 2504), with respect to any Peace Corps volunteer whose
16 service ended involuntarily on March 15, 2020 (or earlier,
17 in the case of any volunteer who was serving in China or
18 Mongolia), when the Director of the Peace Corps sus-
19 pended all volunteer operations due to the coronavirus
20 public health emergency, the Director of the Peace Corps
21 shall—

22 (1) continue to provide the health care de-
23 scribed in section 5(e) of such Act to the volunteer
24 during the period beginning on March 15, 2020, and
25 ending on the earlier of September 15, 2020 or the

1 date on which the volunteers begins employment, to
2 supplement the benefits to which the volunteer is
3 otherwise entitled under section 5 of such Act;

4 (2) waive all nonmedical application require-
5 ments for the reenrollment of the volunteer during
6 the 1-year period beginning on March 15, 2020;

7 (3) expedite the medical clearance for such vol-
8 unteer to facilitate reenrollment;

9 (4) permit the volunteer, to the extent possible,
10 to resume the activity in which the volunteer had
11 been serving at the time of his or her involuntary
12 end of service, or any other activity, by mutual
13 agreement; and

14 (5) provide the volunteer, beginning on the date
15 of reenrollment, with the compensation, allowances,
16 benefits, and other terms and conditions of service
17 to which the volunteer is entitled under such Act.

18 (b) REPORT ON RESTART OF PEACE CORPS OPER-
19 ATIONS FOLLOWING END OF PUBLIC HEALTH EMER-
20 GENCY.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the en-
21 actment of this Act, the Director of the Peace Corps shall
22 submit a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations
23 of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of
24 the House of Representatives that describes the efforts of
25 the Peace Corps—

1 (1) to offer reenrollment to each Peace Corps
2 volunteer whose service ended involuntarily on
3 March 15, 2020 (or earlier, in the case of any volun-
4 teer who was serving in China or Mongolia), due to
5 the coronavirus public health emergency;

6 (2) to obtain approval from countries, as nec-
7 essary, to return reenrolled volunteers to their pre-
8 vious assignments;

9 (3) to provide additional measures necessary for
10 the safety and health of volunteers, including devel-
11 oping contingency plans in the event overseas oper-
12 ations are disrupted by a future COVID–19 out-
13 break;

14 (4) to maintain adequate volunteer recruitment
15 levels for future cohorts; and

16 (5) to identify the anticipated additional appro-
17 priations or new statutory authorities that would be
18 necessary to achieve the goal of safely redeploying
19 7,300 Peace Corps volunteers during the 1-year pe-
20 riod beginning on the date on which Peace Corps op-
21 erations resume.