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Progress in Implementation of the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011

November 2012

Introduction

On November 21, 2011, President Obama signed into law the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011, Public Law 112-57 (“Kate Puzey Act”). In part, the new law codified existing Peace Corps practices and policies, many of which were put in place to better protect and support Peace Corps Volunteers (“Volunteers”). The Kate Puzey Act also imposed new mandates and gave the agency new authorities. While many provisions relate to safety and security, the law addresses a range of topics.

The Peace Corps has made considerable progress in implementing the Kate Puzey Act. Below is a brief summary of that progress. This summary does not include provisions that are being implemented solely by Peace Corps’ Office of Inspector General (OIG). The agency will continue working vigorously to ensure that it complies with the law fully and in a timely manner.

The SARRR program and Intra-Agency Working Groups

The Peace Corps is developing a Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program that not only meets, but goes well beyond, the requirements of the Kate Puzey Act with respect to reducing the risk of sexual assaults and ensuring that Volunteers receive compassionate, timely and comprehensive support. With the assistance of staff from the Department of Justice’s National Institute of Justice, the Peace Corps has created a framework, performance measures and a timeline for the SARRR program. In addition to elements required by the new law – discussed below – the SARRR program will include: an internal campaign to promote reporting and awareness of sexual assaults; enhanced procedures to ensure coordination between different offices at the Peace Corps in responding to sexual assault; and agency monitoring and evaluation of the component parts of the SARRR program to ensure their effectiveness. An intra-agency leadership working group meets regularly to review progress in implementing the SARRR.

Another intra-agency working group has been established to bring together the different offices and individuals at the Peace Corps with responsibility for implementing other provisions of the Kate Puzey Act, unrelated to sexual assaults. The working group includes, among others, representatives of the following Peace Corps offices: the Office of Safety and Security; the Office of Victim Advocacy; the Office of Volunteer Support; the Office of Global Operations; the Office of General Counsel; the Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning; the Office of Management; the Office of the Chief Information Officer; the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection; the Office of Congressional Relations; and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer. These representatives have been assigned to over a dozen sub-groups addressing various provisions of the Kate Puzey Act.

Costs and New Personnel

While the Kate Puzey Act did not provide any funding to pay for its mandates, the agency is committed to paying for the costs of implementation within its current and expected future budgetary resources. The agency has approved funding for new full time equivalents (FTEs) to implement the law in the Office of Victim Advocacy, the Counseling and Outreach Unit (located in the Office of Volunteer Support), the Office of Safety and Security and the Office of General Counsel. The Peace Corps has begun – and in some cases completed – the process of hiring these new FTEs

Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response

- Enhanced Training for Volunteers: In 2011, the Peace Corps replaced prior training for Volunteers on sexual assault issues with new standardized and comprehensive training on sexual assault awareness, risk reduction strategies, Peace Corps reporting and response protocols, and bystander intervention. The new training was reviewed by, and incorporates input from, the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense, and the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN). The training was also reviewed by the agency's Office of General Counsel to ensure compliance with the Kate Puzey Act. The Peace Corps conducted six regional conferences in 2011 at which over 200 overseas staff members were trained in how to deliver the new training. A number of Volunteers have already reported that they have used bystander intervention strategies since receiving Peace Corps training. The Peace Corps is also hiring a training specialist who will design additional training for both staff and Volunteers on sexual assault-related topics.
- New Training for Staff: From April 2012-October 2012 the following overseas staff (approximately 385 total) have received, or will receive, training on the agency's sexual assault protocols and how staff can support Volunteer sexual assault victims: Peace Corps

Medical Officers; Safety and Security Coordinators; Directors of Programming and Training; and Country Directors. Additionally, the Peace Corps has created an online sexual assault awareness training designed for all overseas staff that is currently being reviewed by the Sexual Assault Advisory Council and is due to be launched in 2012.

- Improved Support for Victims of Sexual Assault: The Peace Corps has hired a trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner to coordinate care for victims of sexual assault. The agency is also collaborating with two clinical experts in the clinical sexual assault field to enhance the current medical technical guidance for Peace Corps Medical Officers regarding forensic evidence collection and clinical care.
- Improved Medevac Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault: The Peace Corps has created the Medevac Support Program and has revised its policies and procedures to ensure that Volunteers who are medically evacuated as a result of a sexual assault, stalking or other serious crime are accompanied by a Peace Corps staff member and – when evacuated to Washington, D.C. – are met at the airport by a Peace Corps staff member or representative. New procedures have been put in place to ensure that Volunteers who are medically evacuated are given a choice of medical providers to the extent practicable. In addition, Volunteers who are medically evacuated are currently asked to complete a questionnaire that allows them to evaluate the quality of care they received and the overall medevac experience. The agency is piloting a new survey that asks Volunteers more detailed questions about their individual clinical consultant encounters and the care provided. The agency will be incorporating online versions for the convenience of Volunteers and a better data mining system for quality assessment purposes.
- Anonymous Hotline for Sexual Assault Victims: The Peace Corps has conducted extensive discussions and study to resolve the logistical and operational challenges associated with a 24-hour hotline that Volunteers serving around the globe will be able to access to anonymously report sexual assaults. The agency has hired a clinical psychologist and a clinical social worker to staff and manage the hotline. The Peace Corps plans to launch a pilot hotline in several posts in fiscal year 2013 to collect implementation data that will determine how best to structure the delivery of a full-scale global hotline.
- Restricted Reporting of Sexual Assaults: The Peace Corps has met with officials at the Department of Defense to better understand how the military addresses restricted reporting. The Peace Corps has also conducted internal focus groups with relevant staff and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), and is soliciting feedback from current Volunteers. The agency intends to launch the restricted reporting policy and procedures in the coming months.

- Stalking: The Peace Corps is currently drafting a stalking policy that incorporates best practices from other institutions in addressing and responding to stalking claims. The Peace Corps hopes to have a stalking policy and protocols in place by the end of 2012.
- Sexual Assault Response Liaisons: The Peace Corps has conducted internal focus groups with staff and is soliciting feedback from Volunteers as it determines how best to identify and train Sexual Assault Response Liaisons at every post. The agency expects that deployment of trained Sexual Assault Response Liaisons into the field will take place in 2013.
- Sexual Assault Advisory Council: The Peace Corps' Sexual Assault Advisory Council – consisting of RPCVs and leading experts and professionals in the field – held its first meeting in July 2012 and issued [its first report](#) in November 2012. The Council has already provided valuable input on draft agency policies. The agency is providing extensive support to the Council, including the designation of a Peace Corps staffer to serve as liaison and provide for administrative support to the Council.

Protecting and Supporting Volunteers

- Office of Victim Advocacy: The Peace Corps has formally established, and hired staff for, the Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA). The office currently consists of two Victim Advocates and a support staffer; a third Victim Advocate has been budgeted for fiscal year 2013. The OVA, in coordination with the agency's Office of Communications, has launched an extensive internal outreach campaign to ensure that Volunteers are aware of the services provided by the OVA.
- Incident Tracking and Reporting: The Peace Corps has a global system to track and record incidents against Volunteers, as the Kate Puzey Act requires, and it reports annually on crimes against Volunteers. The Peace Corps has begun systematically tracking arrests, prosecutions and incarcerations for those crimes. Additionally, the Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice worked with the Peace Corps in the spring of 2012 to examine how the agency could best collect data on unreported Volunteer sexual assaults and other crimes. As a result, the Peace Corps has developed and begun to fill a new position to design and field the agency's first anonymous crime victimization survey.
- Ensuring the Safety of Volunteers: The agency issued guidance (Safety and Security Instruction 202) in 2011 to overseas staff on the specific procedures to follow when Volunteers express concerns about their safety, or in any situations that threaten their

well-being. The guidance makes clear that posts must act to ensure the safety of the Volunteer, and that quickly removing Volunteers from a threatening environment is the best way to ensure their safety. The Peace Corps also amended the Peace Corps Manual in 2012 to provide that any Volunteer who feels at risk of imminent bodily harm at his or her site must be expeditiously removed from that site, upon the Volunteer's request (MS 270, section 6.8).

- Support for Victims of Crime: The Peace Corps has revised its policies to reflect the agency's enhanced authority to pay attorney and court costs for Volunteers who are parties, complaining witnesses or otherwise participating in the prosecution of crimes committed against them.
- Memorandum of Understanding: In May 2012, the Peace Corps and the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security signed a memorandum of understanding formalizing, among other matters, how staff of the two agencies will respond to crimes against Peace Corps Volunteers.
- Confidentiality Protection: In January 2011, the Peace Corps issued clear policies – replacing interim guidance that had been in effect since March 2009 – to protect and support Volunteers who make allegations of wrongdoing. Under these policies, Peace Corps staff must take appropriate measures to ensure the Volunteer's safety and confidentiality, and ensure the allegation is given serious consideration, including referral to the OIG, as appropriate. Retaliation against the Volunteer is forbidden. Both Volunteers and overseas staff have been trained on these policies, which are contained in Section 271 of the Peace Corps Manual. The agency is currently revising these policies to ensure, among other things, that they comply fully with the Kate Puzey Act. As part of this process, the agency has consulted with the OIG for guidance on best practices.
- Access to Communications: The Peace Corps has adopted a clear, uniform standard in the Peace Corps Manual regarding Volunteers' access to communications (MS 270, section 6.3), and has surveyed all of its posts to ensure that they are in compliance with this standard. The agency reported to Congress on these efforts in May 2012.

Other Provisions

- Annual Volunteer Survey: The Peace Corps is already in compliance with the requirement that it conduct annual, confidential surveys of Volunteers, and has provided the 2011 global survey results to Congress. The Peace Corps has revised its performance plans for Country Directors to ensure that results from the annual Volunteer survey are considered in annual reviews of Country Director performance.

- Early Termination: The Peace Corps already tracks early terminations of Volunteers, and has provided its first annual report to Congress on the annual early termination rate for Volunteers, including demographic data associated with early termination.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: The Peace Corps is reviewing its monitoring and evaluation plans to ensure that they comply fully with the requirements of the Kate Puzey Act.
- Country Portfolio Review: The Peace Corps completed its second Country Portfolio Review in 2011. The agency is committed to continuing this review process to objectively evaluate the allocation of resources across the countries in which the Peace Corps serves or is considering for service. This process was codified in the Kate Puzey Act.