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

September 2013

Introduction

On November 21, 2011, President Obama signed into law the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act. In part, the law codified existing Peace Corps practices and policies, many of which were put in place to better protect and support Peace Corps 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 significant 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 is near full implementation of the legislation and will continue working vigorously to ensure that it complies with the law fully and in a timely manner.

The Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program and Intra-Agency Working Groups

The Peace Corps has implemented a Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program that not only meets, but goes well beyond, the requirements of the Kate Puzey Act. It is designed to reduce the risk of sexual assault and ensure Volunteers receive compassionate, timely and comprehensive support. With assistance from the Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice, the Peace Corps created a framework, performance measures, and a timeline for the SARRR program. In addition to elements required by the law that are discussed below, the SARRR program includes: an internal campaign to encourage reporting to the agency and raise awareness of sexual assault; enhanced procedures to ensure coordination between different offices at the Peace Corps in responding to sexual assault; and monitoring and evaluation of the SARRR program to ensure effectiveness.

Costs and New Personnel

While the Kate Puzey Act did not provide any funding to pay for its mandates, the agency has committed to paying for the costs of implementation within its current and expected future budgetary resources. The agency has added staff in the Office of Victim Advocacy, the Counseling and Outreach Unit (located in the Office of Health Services), the Office of Safety and Security, and the Office of General Counsel to focus specifically on implementing the SARRR program and the Kate Puzey Act, and better support Volunteers who are victims of crime.

Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response

- Enhanced Training for Volunteers: In 2011, the Peace Corps launched new standardized, comprehensive training for Volunteers on sexual assault awareness, risk-reduction strategies like bystander intervention, reporting to Peace Corps, and response protocols. The new training was reviewed by and incorporates input from outside stakeholders and nationally recognized experts – including the Department of Justice, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the Peace Corps' Office of General Counsel and its Sexual Assault Advisory Council. The Peace Corps conducted six regional conferences in 2011 where hundreds of overseas staff were trained on how to deliver the new training. More than 1,000 Volunteers have reported that they have used bystander intervention strategies since receiving this Peace Corps training. The agency has developed and is currently piloting a post-test assessment tool for Volunteers in six posts to measure if they are applying the skills they learned in pre-service training. The Peace Corps also hired a training specialist who is designing additional training for both staff and Volunteers on sexual assault-related topics.
- New Training for Staff: All key sexual assault responders received training on the agency's sexual assault protocols and how staff can support Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault. All staff will be trained on the SARRR program by the end of 2013. Overseas and headquarters staff have also taken an online sexual assault victim sensitivity training that was launched in December 2012. Pre- and post-test assessments measured the effectiveness of the training.
- Improved Support for Victims of Sexual Assault: The Peace Corps hired a trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner to coordinate clinical care for Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault. The agency continues to collaborate with experts in the clinical sexual assault field to enhance technical guidance for Peace Corps Medical Officers regarding forensic evidence collection and post-assault clinical care.
- Improved Medevac Procedures for Victims of Sexual Assault: The Peace Corps created the Medevac Support Program and revised its policies and procedures to ensure that Volunteers who are medically evacuated as a result of a sexual assault 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 ensure that Volunteers who are medically evacuated are given a choice of medical providers to the extent possible. In addition, the agency has implemented the online Health Provider Satisfaction Survey for

Volunteers to provide feedback to Peace Corps about the care provided by clinical consultants.

- Anonymous Hotline for Sexual Assault Victims: In February 2013, the Peace Corps launched a six-month anonymous sexual assault hotline pilot program in Armenia, Togo, Tanzania, Jordan, Indonesia, Guyana, and Jamaica to provide Volunteers with information about Peace Corps services available to them, options for reporting an assault if they choose to do so, and crisis counseling. The hotline was staffed by mental health clinicians. The pilot is informing the delivery of a full-scale global hotline.
- Restricted Reporting of Sexual Assaults: The Peace Corps instituted a new policy that provides a Volunteer who has been the victim of sexual assault with the option to choose either a Restricted Report or a Standard Report when reporting the incident to Peace Corps. Restricted Reporting enhances Volunteers' privacy by strictly limiting access to information about an assault to only those providing support services requested by the Volunteer. Under Restricted Reporting, Volunteers who might not have come forward due to confidentiality concerns can now access services. Standard Reporting provides Volunteers with the same support services as well as the opportunity to initiate an official investigation, while maintaining confidentiality.
- Stalking: The Peace Corps established a stalking policy that incorporates best practices in addressing and responding to stalking claims, including the Model Campus Stalking Policy developed by the National Center for Victims of Crime Stalking Resource Center.
- Sexual Assault Response Liaisons (SARLs): The Peace Corps has established a Sexual Assault Response Liaison (SARL) program at each Peace Corps post. SARLs are trained to directly assist Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault and accompany them through the in-country response process.
- Sexual Assault Advisory Council: The Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council – consisting of RPCVs and leading experts and professionals in the field of sexual assault – held its first meeting in July 2012 and issued its first report in November 2012. That report had 46 recommendations, and the Peace Corps agrees with and is working to implement the vast majority of them. The Council continues to provide valuable input on agency policies and deliverables. Two meetings were held this fiscal year, and the next Council report is due November 2013.

Protecting and Supporting Volunteers

- Office of Victim Advocacy: The Peace Corps established the Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) in the spring of 2011. The office is led by trained Victim Advocates who are available 24 hours a day. The Victim Advocates within the office ensure that Volunteers are made aware of, and receive access to, services provided by the Peace Corps in cases of sexual assault, stalking and other crimes. From June 2011 to July 2013, the OVA provided outreach and support services to more than 700 current and returned volunteers.

- 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 data is used to analyze trends in countries and across regions, to provide invitees and trainees with current information on risks in their host countries, to develop new training, and to track any new and emerging risks to Volunteers. The Peace Corps has hired a specialist to design and field the agency's first anonymous crime victimization survey based on input from the National Institute of Justice and best practices for surveying crime victims.
- Ensuring the Safety of Volunteers: The agency issued guidance 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 Volunteers, 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 so 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.
- Legal Counsel 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 responds to crimes against Peace Corps Volunteers.
- Confidentiality Protection: The Peace Corps has worked continuously to improve its Volunteer protections and has clear policies in place to protect and support Volunteers who make allegations of wrongdoing. Under these policies, Peace Corps staff must take appropriate measures to ensure Volunteers' safety and confidentiality, and ensure allegations are given serious consideration, including referral to the OIG, as appropriate. Retaliation against Volunteers is strictly forbidden. Both Volunteers and overseas staff have been trained on these policies.
- Access to Communications: The Peace Corps has adopted a clear, uniform standard in the Peace Corps Manual regarding Volunteers' access to communications, 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 in compliance with the requirement that it conduct annual, confidential surveys of Volunteers, and has provided the 2012 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 performance.

- Early Termination: The Peace Corps tracks early terminations of Volunteers, and has provided its second annual report to Congress on the annual early termination rate for Volunteers, including demographic data associated with early termination.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: In conjunction with implementation of the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response program, the Peace Corps is developing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems for the program's activities. The agency will monitor program implementation and outcomes related to policies, training and response. The monitoring and evaluation system incorporates best practices from the evaluation and sexual assault fields.
- Country Portfolio Review: The Peace Corps completed its third Country Portfolio Review in 2012. 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 service.