

# MS 245 Respite Leave

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**Effective Date:** September 30, 2020

**Responsible Offices:** Office of Global Operations, Office of Health Services, and Office of Victim Advocacy, and Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

**Supersedes:** 06/10/2019; 02/03/17; 05/26/2015

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Issuance Memo (05/26/2015)

Issuance Memo (02/03/2017)

Issuance Memo (06/10/2019)

Issuance Memo (09/30/2020)

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## 1.0 Purpose

This manual section sets out the Peace Corps policy regarding respite leave for Volunteers and Trainees (“Volunteers”).

## 2.0 Authority

22 U.S.C. §2504.

## 3.0 Policy

The Peace Corps may authorize in-country Respite Leave and travel, at the agency’s expense, for Volunteers in the event of a traumatic event that a Volunteer experienced during service.

### 3.1 Purpose of Respite Leave

Respite Leave is granted in cases where the leave may provide appropriate respite, recovery or resolution to a traumatic event the Volunteer has experienced within the time allotted.

### 3.2 Respite Leave Requests

(a) A Volunteer may request Respite Leave through the Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA), the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO), and/or the Country Director (CD). If OVA or the PCMO receives such a request, the Country Director will be informed in a timely fashion.

(1) In Restricted Report cases of sexual assault, the Volunteer should request Respite Leave from the PCMO or OVA. In such cases, the Country Director is not informed of the request.

(b) A Volunteer can be considered for Respite Leave if the following conditions are satisfied:

(1) The traumatic event prompting the Respite Leave request is the result of any of the following incidents that happen during Peace Corps training and service:

- (i) a sexual assault;
  - (ii) stalking;
  - (iii) an aggravated physical assault;
  - (iv) being a victim or witness to a violent crime; or
  - (v) directly experiencing or witnessing an accident that resulted in serious injury or a person's death.
- (2) The Volunteer reported the incident to the Peace Corps and requests Respite Leave within 30 days of submitting that report.
- (3) The PCMO does not believe that medical hold is warranted at the time of the request.
- (c) Following a traumatic event, post staff and/or agency offices (e.g., OVA and BHO) may inform a Volunteer of the option to request Respite Leave.

### **3.3 Verification and Approval Authority**

- (a) The Country Director, in consultation with the PCMO, will evaluate the request for Respite Leave taking into account the criteria set out in 3.2(b)(1)-(3). Respite Leave is only provided after it is determined that the Volunteer's experience has met the criteria.
- (b) For Restricted Reports of sexual assault, the PCMO will be responsible for evaluating and approving Respite Leave requests. For administrative purposes at post, Respite Leave in Restricted Report cases will be categorized as "medical hold" to protect the confidentiality of the victim. When necessary, the PCMO may consult with OHS/BHO to determine if Respite Leave is appropriate. All other Respite Leave requests must be granted by the Country Director.
- (c) Once the Respite Leave is approved, the CD or the CD's designee (or in Restricted Report cases, the PCMO) will promptly record the approval in CARS/CMS (or any succeeding case management system) for tracking purposes.
- (d) The Volunteer may request and receive an evaluation for mental health treatment regardless of approval for Respite Leave.
- (e) Respite Leave can only be granted once for each report of a traumatic event, or, if multiple traumatic events are experienced simultaneously, Respite Leave can only be granted once for the report of those traumatic events. Respite Leave days cannot be split up or taken at multiple times, unless the CD (or in Restricted Report cases, the PCMO) determines that extenuating circumstances are present and warrant an exception. Respite Leave may not be combined with annual leave.

- (f) With respect to requests and approvals of Respite Leave, Peace Corps staff remain subject to all applicable confidentiality provisions, including those in MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault* and MS 294 *Confidentiality of Volunteer Information*.
- (g) Volunteers may experience traumatic events that are not listed in Section 3.2(b)(1), above, but still may warrant time away from site for recovery (for example, the unexpected death of a host family member, or a natural disaster). In those cases, the appropriate staff person may authorize other types of leave or time away from site to Volunteers, pursuant to MS 220 *Leave for Volunteers/Trainees*.

### **3.4 Respite Leave Travel and Locations**

- (a) Respite Leave is approved for immediate in-country travel and Volunteers are expected to begin Respite Leave as soon as feasible following approval.
- (b) Each post is required to establish a post-specific list of permissible in-country locations for the Respite Leave. Examples of permissible in-country locations include, but are not limited to, approved hotels or another Volunteer's site.
- (c) In consultation with the Volunteer, the staff person granting Respite Leave (the CD, or in the case of Restricted Reports, the PCMO) will determine permissible in-country locations for the Respite Leave, according to the post-specific list. Volunteers on Respite Leave must adhere to existing travel and whereabouts policies at post.

### **3.5 Respite Leave Duration**

Volunteers can be granted an initial Respite Leave of 1-7 calendar days. This period will be determined by the CD (or in the case of Restricted Reports, the PCMO).

In situations that warrant more time away from site, the CD (or in the case of Restricted Reports, the PCMO) has the discretion to extend Respite Leave up to a total of 14 calendar days, inclusive of the initial Respite Leave days.

## **4.0 Volunteer Allowances during Respite Leave**

### **4.1 Respite Leave Allowance**

Volunteers will be reimbursed for travel expenses and per diem according to post's travel reimbursement policies.

Volunteers not staying in a hotel or commercial property during the Respite Leave are not eligible for lodging reimbursement.

### **4.2 Living Allowance**

The Volunteer will continue to receive the normal living allowance during Respite Leave and during travel time.

## **5.0 Effective Date**

- (a) The effective date of this policy is the date of issuance.