

February 6, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota
HB 1529

Re: Resident student tuition for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs)

Dear Chairman Beltz and Members of the Committee,

I am writing as a North Dakota resident who benefited greatly from service in the U.S. Peace Corps. I served with Americans from across the country who were committed to using the education and experience they obtained in the United States to help others grow and thrive.

Peace Corps builds prosperity in the countries where it works, and it strengthens the skills of Americans. I served in Nicaragua for 3 years as an Agribusiness and Sustainable Agriculture volunteer. In addition to secondary projects like teaching English, we established two agriculturally based businesses in my community, selling products to grocery stores and restaurants in the capital city.

The skills I gained, resulting from my service, have propelled me forward throughout my academic and professional career. Peace Corps training is world class. I received intense Spanish instruction, project management training, and learned to creatively solve problems with limited resources. I had the privilege of working alongside incredibly innovative people throughout my service.

This experience was foundational in my career. Returning to the United States, I moved to Washington D.C. and managed education programs for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). I received a Master of Arts in Economic Development from the Catholic University of America and went on to lead their graduate studies in economic development. Today I serve as North Dakota's State Refugee Coordinator, ensuring that those who go through the overseas screening and vetting process and obtain legal Refugee status can apply their skills, contribute to new communities, and make North Dakota home.

Peace Corps gave me the real-world skills and confidence to make a positive difference in my community. During my time at NASA, I became knowledgeable of Harvard Professor Tony Wagner's, 7 Survival Skills for the 21st Century. According to his research, the most essential skills for success today include problem solving, collaboration across networks, adaptability, initiative, communication skills, analyzing information, and imagination. All the skills I had the opportunity to develop as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Taking steps to attract Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to pursue education, live, and work in North Dakota will have a positive impact on our communities and the economy. The volunteers I served with regularly obtained graduate degrees and went on to hold leadership positions in organizations and in their communities across the country. They are individuals who are willing to work hard for the greater good.

Returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) tend to pursue graduate level education. Typically, the cost of graduate level education is the same for in-state and out-of-state residents. The Coverdell Fellows Program was established by the Peace Corps to provide financial incentives for RPCVs to choose their partner schools. This resource is used broadly by RPCVs. An additional positive step would be for ND institutions to establish their own Coverdell Fellows program, to attract RPCVs to their academic institutions.

Sincerely,

Holly Triska-Dally
District 8