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

MAY 7, 2020

Mr. VAN HOLLEN (for Mr. Markey (for himself, Mr. Van Hollen, and Mr. Blumenthal)) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

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.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

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

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

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

(2) The Corporation for National and Community Service (referred to in this Act as “CNCS”), through the health, disaster, and poverty services administered by the CNCS under the 3 flagship AmeriCorps programs (AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC, and AmeriCorps State and National Volunteers), is uniquely positioned to aid frontline workers and communities most impacted by the coronavirus public health emergency if the President of the United States fully mobilizes those 3 programs.
(3) The Federal Emergency Management Agency (referred to in this section as “FEMA”), tasked with leading aspects of the whole-of-government response to the coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly understaffed of those frontline workers that are essential to responding to the public health emergency.

(4) On March 15, 2020, the Peace Corps involuntarily ended the service of approximately 7,300 volunteers. Many of them acquired public health skills in countries abroad, which may also be applied to further service in AmeriCorps, service in FEMA, or continuing service in the Peace Corps once operations of the Peace Corps are to resume.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF THE SENATE.

It is the sense of the Senate that—

(1) the President should fully utilize the competencies of the Federal Government workforce to battle the outbreak of coronavirus, the worst global health emergency the United States has faced in a century, as well as make available expanded opportunities for individuals in the United States desiring to serve their country in its time of need;

(2) the President should elevate the role of CNCS within the whole-of-government response to
the coronavirus outbreak, including by urging its
Chief Executive Officer to—

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

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

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

(3) the United States should expand the Cadre
of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE)
program, administered by the Federal Emergency
Management Agency, to enlist individuals in the
United States to solve public health and supply-man-
agement challenges related to the coronavirus out-
break, as well as challenges related to wildfires, hurricanes, and other disasters; and

(4) bolstering the number full-time positions at the Federal Emergency Management Agency will also expand national service opportunities for qualified individuals in the United States who have become unemployed or underemployed as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, including the approximately 7,300 Peace Corps volunteers whose service ended on March 15, 2020.

SEC. 4. MOBILIZING PROGRAMS IN THE CORONAVIRUS PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.

(a) PRIORITIZING CERTAIN AGREEMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any provision of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (42 U.S.C. 4950 et seq.) or the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12501 et seq.), the Chief Executive Officer of CNCS, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, State governments, and State Commissions, as defined in section 101 of the National and Community Service Act of 1990, shall, for the period described in paragraph
(2), prioritize existing agreements, or enter into new agreements, with public and private nonprofit organizations, that will direct volunteers in programs administered by CNCS to assignments that assist individuals most impacted by the coronavirus public health emergency, including assignments—

(A) providing support services to veterans, homeless populations, the elderly, and other individuals who may be most vulnerable during the coronavirus public health emergency;

(B) supporting health care professionals and related positions;

(C) offering before- and after-school tutoring and instruction for children in low-income areas, and offering adult basic skills and literacy tutoring and instruction, including through remote learning;

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

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

(F) performing other functions consistent with addressing the coronavirus public health emergency, including assisting with testing and contact tracing.
(2) **PERIOD.**—The period described in this paragraph—

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

(B) shall end—

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

(ii) not later than 2 years after the conclusion of such emergency.

(b) **AUTHORIZATION FOR ADDITIONAL RECRUITMENT OF AMERICORPS VOLUNTEERS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—

(A) **INCREASE IN NUMBER OF POSITIONS.**—Section 121(f)(1)(B) of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12571(f)(1)(B)) is amended—

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

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

(iii) by adding at the end the following:

“(viii) 500,000 for each of fiscal years 2020 through 2022;”.
(B) REAUTHORIZATIONS.—

(i) AMERICORPS VISTA.—Section 501(a)(1) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (42 U.S.C. 5081(a)(1)) is amended by striking “$100,000,000 for fiscal year 2010 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the fiscal years 2011 through 2014” and inserting “such sums as may be necessary for each of fiscal years 2020 through 2022”.

(ii) AMERICORPS NCCC.—Section 501(a)(1)(A) of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12681(a)(1)(A)) is amended—

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

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

(iii) AMERICORPS STATE AND NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS.—Section 501(a)(2) of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12681(a)(2)) is
amended by striking “2010 through 2014”
and inserting “2020 through 2022”.

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

(A) unemployed veterans;

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

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

(3) ELIGIBILITY.—

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

(i) any individual who is authorized to
work in the United States, including any
individual granted Deferred Action for
Childhood Arrivals (DACA) pursuant to
the program announced by the Secretary
of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012,
and any individual granted Temporary
Protected Status pursuant to section 244(a)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1254(a)(1)), may not be disqualified from being recruited or selected for any assignment described in subsection (a) based solely on his or her citizenship or immigration status; and

(ii) any individual who has filed for bankruptcy, or who has a poor credit rating, determined by the Chief Executive Officer of CNCS to be the result of the coronavirus public health emergency may not be disqualified from being recruited or selected for any assignment described in subsection (a) based solely on such bankruptcy or credit reporting.

(B) CLARIFICATION.—No individual described in clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (A) who is recruited or selected for an assignment described in subsection (a) shall become disqualified from continuing to serve in such assignment after the expiration of the period described in subsection (a)(2) solely on the basis of his or her citizenship or immigration status, bankruptcy status, or credit score.
(c) BRIEFING TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 30
days after the date of enactment of this Act, and every
180 days thereafter through fiscal year 2022, the Chief
Executive Officer of CNCS shall submit a report, to the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of
the Senate and the Committee on Education and Labor
of the House of Representatives, on the operating plan of
the CNCS to carry out subsections (a) and (b), including
the amendments under subsection (b).

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

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

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

(1) in subsection (a), by striking “$18,000”
and inserting “$25,000”; and
(2) in subsection (e)(1), by striking “$19,500” and inserting “$30,000”.

(f) Waiver of Matching Funds Requirements.—Section 189A of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12645d) is amended—

(1) in the section heading, by inserting “; MATCHING FUNDS DURING CORONAVIRUS PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY” after “COMMUNITIES”;  

(2) by redesignating subsection (b) as subsection (c); and

(3) by inserting after subsection (a) the following:

“(b) COVID–19 Response.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an entity that receives assistance from the Corporation for any program under the national service laws (including a State Commission and an entity receiving subgrant funds) during the coronavirus public health emergency, as defined in section 4(g) of the Undertaking National Initiatives to Tackle Epidemic Act of 2020, shall not be subject to any requirements to provide matching funds for any such program, and the Federal share of such assistance for a recipient (including for a State Commission and a subgrant recipient) may be 100 percent.”.
(g) CORONAVIRUS PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DEFINED.—In this section, the term “coronavirus public health emergency” means the public health emergency declared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 247d) on January 31, 2020, with respect to COVID–19.

SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION FOR SURGE CAPACITY FOR FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—For fiscal years 2020 through 2022 and subject to the appropriation of funds, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall appoint, administer, and expedite the training of an additional 62,000 Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees, under the Response and Recover Directorate (referred to in this section as “CORE employees”) under the Office of Response and Recovery, above the level of such employees in fiscal year 2019, to address the coronavirus public health emergency and other disasters and public emergencies.

(b) DETAIL OF CORE EMPLOYEES.—A CORE employee may be detailed, through mutual agreement and on a non-reimbursable basis, to any Federal agency or to a State, local, or Tribal government to fulfill an assignment consistent with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and
Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.) and emergency work (as defined in section 206.225 of title 44, Code of Federal Regulations, or any successor thereto), including—

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

(2) facilitating COVID–19 testing and surveillance activities;

(3) tracing contacts of infected individuals and the status of the individuals while being quarantined;

(4) providing nutritional assistance to vulnerable populations; and

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

(c) REQUIREMENT.—As soon as feasible, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall make public job announcements to fill the CORE employee positions authorized under subsection (a), which shall prioritize hiring from among the following groups of individuals:

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

(3) AmeriCorps members, Peace Corps Volunteers, and United States Fulbright Scholars who have had their service terms ended as a result of the coronavirus public health emergency.

(4) Recent graduates of public health, medical, nursing, social work, or related health-services programs.

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

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

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

(e) TRAINING.—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency may make appropriate adjustments to the standard training course curriculum for employees under this section to include on-site trainings at regional offices of the Federal Emergency
Management Agency, virtual trainings, or trainings conducted by other Federal, State, local, or Tribal agencies to fulfill functions described in subsection (b).

(f) Authorization of Appropriations.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency $6,500,000,000, for each of fiscal years 2020, 2021, and 2022, of which not less than $1,500,000,000 shall be used each fiscal year for the administrative costs associated with carrying out this section.

(g) Eligibility for Hiring.—For the purposes of hiring employees under this section—

(1) any individual who is authorized to work in the United States, including any individual granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) pursuant to the program announced by the Secretary of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012, and any individual granted Temporary Protected Status pursuant to section 244(a)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1254a(a)(1)), may not be disqualified from being hired as an employee under this section based solely on his or her citizenship or immigration status; and

(2) any individual who has filed bankruptcy, or who has a poor credit rating, determined by the Ad-
ministrator of the Federal Emergency Management
Agency to be a result of the coronavirus public
health emergency may not be disqualified from being
hired as an employee under this section based solely
on such bankruptcy or credit rating.

(h) **CORONAVIRUS PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY**

**DEFINED.**—In this section, the term “coronavirus public
health emergency” has the meaning given the term in sec-
tion 4(g).

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

(a) **ASSISTANCE FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

**WHOSE SERVICE ENDED INVOLUNTARILY.**—Notwith-
standing section 5 of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C.
2504), with respect to any Peace Corps volunteer whose
service ended involuntarily on March 15, 2020 (or earlier,
in the case of any volunteer who was serving in China or
Mongolia), when the Director of the Peace Corps sus-
pended all volunteer operations due to the coronavirus
public health emergency, the Director of the Peace Corps
shall—

(1) continue to provide the health care de-
scribed in section 5(e) of such Act to the volunteer
during the period beginning on March 15, 2020, and
ending on the earlier of September 15, 2020, or the
date on which the volunteers begins employment, to
supplement the benefits to which the volunteer is
otherwise entitled under section 5 of such Act;

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

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

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

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

(b) Report on Restart of Peace Corps Oper-
ations Following End of Public Health Emer-
gency.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the en-
actment of this Act, the Director of the Peace Corps shall
submit a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations
of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of
the House of Representatives that describes the efforts of
the Peace Corps—
(1) to offer reenrollment to each Peace Corps volunteer whose service ended involuntarily on March 15, 2020 (or earlier, in the case of any volunteer who was serving in China or Mongolia), due to the coronavirus public health emergency;

(2) to obtain approval from countries, as necessary, to return reenrolled volunteers to their previous assignments;

(3) to provide additional measures necessary for the safety and health of volunteers, including developing contingency plans in the event overseas operations are disrupted by a future COVID–19 outbreak;

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

(5) to identify the anticipated additional appropriations or new statutory authorities that would be necessary to achieve the goal of safely redeploying 7,300 Peace Corps volunteers during the 1-year period beginning on the date on which Peace Corps operations resume.