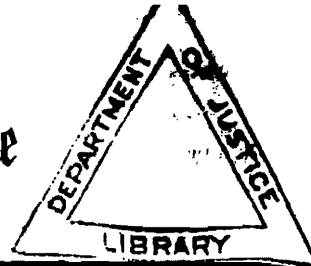




# Department of Justice



REFERENC

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STATEMENT

BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL SERVICE CORPS

OF THE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE

MAY 29, 1963

This bill is a call to service. It is a challenge to people of all ages to follow the example of those in the Peace Corps--to serve their nation by helping other citizens to help themselves.

This bill is a challenge to youth. It is a challenge to millions of older and retired people whose reservoir of skill and experience remains untapped. It is a challenge to all of our people; to do more than merely talk about the ideal of service.

Every sixth citizen in the United States needs our help; there are five of us who should help him.

Six months ago, the President asked me to chair a Cabinet committee to determine whether the principle embodied in the Peace Corps could be applied effectively at home. This study has involved the attention of the Secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Interior and Health, Education and Welfare, the Administrators of the Housing and Home Finance Agency and Veterans Affairs, and the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission. We also have been assisted by Mr. Shriver, the Director of the Peace Corps, and Mr. Gordon, Director of the Bureau of the Budget.

One aspect of our work has been the study of deprivation.

The facts are discouraging. Millions live with pride but without resources in the mountains and valleys that run from Alabama and Kentucky to West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Millions more live in city slums only blocks away from unprecedented wealth.

The information booklet which has been submitted by the study group to the members of this subcommittee and the Congress contains many examples of the high price of poverty--examples members of the study group saw firsthand only a month ago.

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They visited a state hospital for the mentally retarded on a bright April day when you would have expected all the children to be playing outside. Not one was outside, nor was there a single child in either the well-equipped gymnasium or the classroom, well-stocked with books.

The children were inside, standing in a room which was bare but for a few benches. The floor was covered with urine.

Severely retarded patients were left naked in cubicles--which suggested kennels--made of an elevated mattress enclosed on three sides of high marble slabs and covered on the fourth side by wire mesh so thick you could barely see through it.

Patients were washed by a device resembling a car-wash--a spraying mechanism through which patients could be directed without the need for anyone to touch them.

The only toilets for the approximately 70 patients in a large ward were located in the middle of the room, permitting no privacy.

The hospital's hard-working but inadequate staff could provide at best only custodial care.

There is not even custodial care for great numbers of migratory farm workers--who live in almost unbelievable squalor.

At a Southwestern migratory labor camp one morning last month, a husband, his wife, and their 14 and 15-year old sons had to leave for the fields at 4:30 a.m. in order to reach work in tomato fields 30 miles away. They had to leave their 11-year-old daughter Sarah at home with three younger children because she has a crippled arm and cannot work in the fields.

All day, until the trucks came back from the fields at six in the evening Sarah was responsible for three younger children, one 7, one 4 and a sick baby six months old.

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While she was fixing lunch for the children and trying to keep an eye on the baby, four-year-old Pete knocked a pan of boiling water off the oil burner, scalding his right leg and arm. His screams attracted an elderly woman in the next row of shacks. She did the best she could with home remedies. Nevertheless, within a day or so, infection set in. Finally, Pete was taken to the County Hospital but even after treatment, he was left permanently crippled.

In another camp, cotton picking was over, after a season shortened by the introduction of mechanical cotton pickers. The last work the pickers had found was six weeks before, 300 miles west, and then it was only for a short time.

One family of eleven people had been living in their car for three months. The mother and father slept in the car and two of the children were tucked into the trunk. The nine children ranged in age from three months to 14 years old.

The mother was seriously ill. The children were suffering from malnutrition and were unbelievably dirty because of the lack of sanitary facilities. All had been without food for several days. They had no money and virtually no hope; they did not know where to turn for help. Since they were not residents of the area their appeals were certain to be rejected.

These are not isolated examples.

#### Migratory Farm Workers

Of some 400,000 domestic migratory workers, 92,000 could find work for less than 25 days in 1960. The remainder, who worked more than 25 days, earned an average of \$1,000 for the year. Those who worked less than 25 days received only \$388.

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Because of their constant movement from place to place following a harvest, migratory children fall years behind in education.

#### Alaskan Needs

In the Wade Hampton District of Alaska, which has a native population of 3,000, the median of school years completed is only 1.6. In Bethel, the 5,000 Alaskans average only a second grade education.

Only 13 percent of the Alaskan rural natives have structurally sound housing. In Wade Hampton, which has 528 occupied homes, 476 are either deteriorating or dilapidating. None has a flush toilet. Only seven have hot and cold piped water. An average of 4 1/2 persons occupy each room.

Alaskan natives on the average live only 30 years, compared to more than 62 years for the entire U.S. population.

#### Educational Needs

There are more than 8 million Americans over 25 years of age who are illiterate. In 1960, 8.4 percent of our population 25 years or over had completed less than five years of school. More than one-fifth of our men fail the selective service pre-induction mental exam.

#### Mortality Rates

It is still true that a non-white mother is four times as likely to die in childbirth as a white mother.

#### Indians

The Indian infant death rate is almost twice that of any other race-- 47 per 1,000 live births.

Life expectancy for Indians is 42 years, 20 years less than for Americans as a whole.

## Appalachia

The underdeveloped area known as Appalachia covers parts of nine states, and has a population of more than 8,000,000 people. People lack education. They are unemployed, undernourished, and live in sub-standard housing. Many rural counties show a per capita income of less than \$500 annually. In many areas there is a functional illiteracy rate of over 20 percent.

These are the existing needs which call for a new approach, a mobilization of millions of our people to help others help themselves. Based on our experience with the Peace Corps abroad, I firmly believe that the National Service Corps can mount such an attack.

In the same way that thousands of our people have volunteered to serve in remote, dangerous and almost unknown corners of the world, Americans are equally willing to take on the toughest jobs in this country.

These jobs lie in five areas of critical human need. Corpsmen will work with the mentally retarded and mentally ill, the aged and the dependent children; with the Indians living on their reservations and off; with residents of rural depressed areas and of urban slums; and with migratory workers.

Our studies have shown each of these areas of need to be equally compelling. Each is a national responsibility.

We propose a corps of 5,000 persons, qualified, carefully trained and chosen for their skills. We recognize that the working hands and minds of these 5,000 will not solve all these problems.

However, the existence of this national effort will focus the attention of all Americans upon these pockets of need and call forth in a way that the most dedicated activities of local groups cannot do an army of

citizens dedicated to service in their own communities or in State or local Peace Corps. Small though it be, we believe a corps of 5,000 is the minimum number capable of mobilizing this attack.

Specifically, what would the corpsmen do? Many local groups are so enthusiastic about the prospects for this program that they have written detailed appeals for corpsmen. Already, we have received so many requests that even the Corps at full strength could not fulfill them all. One example will demonstrate what I mean.

The San Carlos Apache Tribal Council at the Arizona counties of Gila, Graham and Pinal has asked for six corpsmen to live with the tribe. Seventy-five percent of these tribe members are unemployed. Half the families receive less than \$500 a year in income. Housing conditions are desperate. Two rooms house 14 for eating, sleeping, and cooking. The houses are cold in the winter and so hot in summer that people must live outdoors. There is no running water.

Two of the six corpsmen would be general construction workers, experienced in plumbing, wiring, carpentry and masonry, who would help in construction and maintenance of homes.

One would be a farm assistant with knowledge of family agriculture to teach techniques of animal husbandry, family gardening, small machinery maintenance, and repair.

Two corpsmen would teach reading, writing, and accounting skills to adults.

The sixth corpsman would be an assistant to work with families on nutrition, infant care, preservation of food, and home medical care.

As a companion effort, corpsmen would help train others to teach these subjects so that corpsmen would, after a period of time, be able to turn their duties over to local volunteers.

This is one example of what six corpsmen could do.

Corpsmen would themselves perform varied tasks, in different settings, attacking many kinds of need. But their work would have one major emphasis. Always they would be working directly with people in need--helping them to help themselves. They would not be recruiters by deed but by example.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to emphasize that the Corps would not compete with existing groups or displace them. It would consult and cooperate with interested local service groups-- and in this sense the program would give recognition and a shot-in the arm to the millions of dedicated Americans working on these problems in their own communities. For example, in undertaking projects in urban areas the Corps would seek the cooperation and support of local health and welfare councils.

We do not want to supplant local institutions or compete with local volunteer bureaus. Our goal is to strengthen the local volunteer structures. Where their activities are meeting the needs of the community, the Corps would not undertake to duplicate their efforts. However, it is obvious that despite their efforts there still are great needs which are not being met.

This program could help those already on the job, encourage local voluntarism, and promote the creation of more local volunteer agencies.

We believe that the existence of a National Service Corps also will attract many more people to the service professions, most of which badly need personnel. And Mr. Chairman, this is a very important point.

Every project would have to meet two conditions. First, it would have to provide for work with the people who most need help. Corpsmen would not be sent to localities which have sufficient local resources and programs. They would concentrate on the "pockets" of need where there are not sufficient people or resources.

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Second, it would be inappropriate and destructive to superimpose this program over local community efforts. We are determined that a new bureaucracy shall not be built. We intend to work through existing state and local agencies and institutions. The Corps would consider projects only at local request--only after a locality has specifically invited corpsmen to perform jobs that have been clearly defined.

The local request would have to be a basic statement--not of what the community wanted to get for free from the government, but how it would use the people this program will provide. Consistent with the purpose of stimulating increased volunteer efforts at the local level, each project request would have to present a plan for the phasing out of corpsmen.

The demand for this program is clearly demonstrated by the expressions already received from state and local public and private organizations serving migratory workers, Indians, residents of depressed or isolated rural areas, or of urban slums, and persons cared for in institutions.

That there are a great many people who would and could serve in the program is equally clear. The analyses of recruitment showed overwhelming support by the two groups which would supply most of the corpsmen--college students and retired persons. We have tested the appeal with those in the overseas Peace Corps and find that even after two years of service abroad, a significant number would serve in a domestic corps.

Our surveys and the conclusions of prominent scholars in these fields show that a tenth of our population is fallow. Millions of Americans who have years of productivity and service to offer are dormant. Retired teachers, craftsmen, tradesmen really don't want to go to the seashore to fade away. They want to help. So many of these people have come forward that I am convinced they can accomplish something unique in this country,

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something undone by all the federal, state, county and private agencies, something still to be done.

The tradition on which this program would depend is one of the basic strengths of our nation. That is the tradition of helping your neighbor. We are by nature hospitable and generous. In our colonial period, everyone was a volunteer. This voluntarism is alive today. It finds a magnificent example in the men and women of the Peace Corps, an example the National Service Corps would put to work here at home.

This program would ask Americans to invest a year of their lives--at no salary and under spartan conditions, to help millions of their fellow citizens who, through no fault of their own, are denied the essentials of a decent life.

This concept is idealistic but we are proud of it. We urge you to help make this idealism a reality.

I think it is well to remember that we can talk about democracy, about the free enterprise system, about how effective our economic programs have been in the United States and the prosperity of our citizens. But, in the last analysis, people in our own country and across the world are going to be impressed less with what we say, than what we do.

We can have the Polaris submarine and Gordon Cooper and John Glenn, but if we also continue to have large numbers of Indians who have lived for decades as second-class citizens, if we have migrant workers whose problems are being ignored, if we have mentally retarded and they are not being adequately helped, then no matter how many orbits our astronauts make around the globe, no matter how the gross national product grows, we will leave other peoples unimpressed.

Our definitive actions to deal with our ills and our faults are what ~~is going to make the difference in what people think of us around the globe.~~

This program that we are recommending is not the end-all. It does not have the complete answer.

It does, however, Mr. Chairman combine the idealism of the American people and the willingness of our citizens to help one another, together with important constructive steps toward remedying serious ills.