



Overseas Comparability Pay Lapse

Real-world consequences for diplomats and their families

The possible lapse in Overseas Comparability Pay (OCP) threatens the financial well-being of at least 11,000 Foreign Service members across all six foreign affairs agencies. From struggling to meet college expenses to delaying medical care, the impact of an OCP lapse would be an undeniable financial hardship but could have long-term impacts on morale and retention at a time when U.S. competitiveness with China and Russia is at stake.

As the labor union and professional association of the Foreign Service, we surveyed our members about how a potential lapse could impact their lives and their livelihoods. Here are some of their stories.

If the OCP lapses, my mortgage payment will not be made, and my child's college tuition will not be paid. I am serving at a dangerous and unaccompanied post. [OCP] allows my family to live a decent life under hardships of separation and time away from my family. Any lapse in OCP will hurt hardworking foreign service officers when the world needs more diplomacy to prevent dangerous conflicts from escalating.

- Anonymous

My spouse had to give up her job for us to move overseas, so we are dependent on just my income...Without OCP, we'll have to stop saving for my daughter's education and cut my retirement savings in order to cover our monthly expenses. Cutting OCP would move us from being comfortably middle class to living paycheck-to-paycheck. None of us are doing this job for the money - we're here because we believe in the mission and want to serve our country, and I feel incredibly fortunate to do so. I just wish that I didn't have to worry about providing for my family.

- Anonymous

This OCP lapse would hurt early career officers like me who have little savings, continue to have student loans, and are starting families. Losing 20% of my paycheck would force me to choose between important medical procedures, our mortgage, and my wife's student loans. It would make a challenging post more difficult for my family. I am not the only one making a sacrifice by being here -- my spouse is also sacrificing career opportunities, comfort and safety to support the mission. If we could not make ends meet, I can't justify asking her to make that sacrifice.

- State Dept Assistant Information Officer (Algeria)

For us, this potential OCP loss comes on the heels of an already 50% hit to our family income. We are struggling to meet current college and family commitments, and we are looking ahead to another child in college next year. An additional 22% pay cut on top of our recent shift from two to one salaries will devastate our finances.

- Anonymous

As a veterinarian, with OCP, I already earn 40% less (or more) than others in my profession with similar experience. Having only paid off my own student loans last year, I already struggle to save for my own children's college funds, with my oldest graduating high school in three years. With recent unexpected medical expenses, college savings is again already on hold without losing OCP. My children attended 4 schools in 11 months last year due to needs of the agency, I had hoped to provide them with a life where they were not paying off student loans into their 40s.

- USDA Veterinarian (Japan)

OCP lapse concerns me because in less than 12 months I am required to take home leave...OCP makes up 20% of my pay, and now I am looking at how I will be able to afford home leave and what to cut. That means less into the TSP, less support for my oldest in college, delayed medical visits, and less opportunity for my youngest in a city that is one of the most expensive cities in the world.

- State Department FSO (Singapore)

Losing almost a quarter of my salary would certainly lower my motivation and morale as Foreign Service Facility Manager...as someone in their 30s with no home purchased back home, supporting a family of five, including myself, OCP is a way to save money so we can overcome inflation and have a place to rest when we are too old and worn out to continue in the Foreign Service. Make no mistake, being constantly stationed abroad wears you out; it is interesting, we chose this path, but it is very challenging.

- State Department Foreign Service Facility Manager (Oman)

My husband and I have been excitedly waiting to start our family. We knew when we joined the Foreign Service to serve our country, we would have to wait to have our first child. After waiting and saving and praying, we were finally ready to start trying for our first child in October. The uncertainty about pay has changed everything. With a 22% pay cut, we will have to continue to wait to begin our family. We are incredibly ready to begin parenthood, but we cannot responsibly do so if there is a lapse in OCP.

- Anonymous