

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20001

June 15th, 2020

Dear Mr. President,

**Re: Review of non-immigrant programs subject to Section 6 of Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market during the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak.**

We are writing on behalf of students and student governments at 72 universities to highlight the crucial role America's strength in the global postsecondary education market has on our nation's economic growth and research enterprise. Our leadership in this market manifests in our continued ability to attract the best and the brightest students from around the world to our colleges and universities. One significant draw for this global talent is the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which has enjoyed decades of broad bipartisan support and offers talented international students who complete a U.S. degree the opportunity to temporarily remain in the country to enhance their educational experience and contribute to our economy.

We recognize that the administration is reviewing the OPT program as it examines additional actions following the April 22 executive order, "*Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market during the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak.*" Section 6 instructs the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to review non-immigrant programs and recommend measures to stimulate the economy and prioritize the hiring and employment of U.S. workers. **We strongly urge you to maintain the OPT program and the STEM OPT extension in their entirety, as suspending or limiting them would hurt the U.S. economy, American workers, and American innovation.**

International students contributed nearly \$45 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018-2019 alone and supported more than 450,000 jobs.<sup>1</sup> They serve as essential instructors and teaching assistants to students and are thus fundamental to the postsecondary education system. Yet their enrollment numbers have seen a decline in recent years (from 300,743 in 2015-16 to 269,383 in 2018-19),<sup>2</sup> while universities in Canada,<sup>3</sup> Australia,<sup>4</sup> and the UK<sup>5</sup> have seen a record increase. If the OPT program is suspended or limited, these numbers may fall even further.

There is a shortage of domestic workers to fill high-skilled 21st century jobs, as was found by a report commissioned by the Ronald Reagan Foundation<sup>6</sup> and also echoed by a bipartisan group of Congressional

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of International Education. (2019). [Economic Impact of International Students](#)

<sup>2</sup> Redden, E. (2019). [Number of Enrolled International Students Drops](#). Inside Higher Ed.

<sup>3</sup> Hoult, J. (2019). [Another record year for Canadian international education](#). Canadian Bureau for International Education.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government Department of Education. (2019). [International Student Data Monthly Summary, September 2019](#)

<sup>5</sup> Higher Education Statistics Agency (2020). [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19](#)

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Task Force on 21st-Century National Security Technology and Workforce. (2020). [The Contest for Innovation: Strengthening America's National Security Innovation Base in an Era of Strategic Competition](#). Ronald Reagan Institute.

Representatives.<sup>7,8</sup> International students fill these critical skills gaps in our economy, and access to skilled employees further allows businesses to expand, creating even more jobs. **Without the OPT program, in the next decade the country could lose 443,000 jobs, including 255,000 jobs held by native-born workers, causing an increase in American unemployment.**<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, unemployment rates have been lower in areas with larger numbers of students working as part of OPT.<sup>10</sup> As international students seek education elsewhere—in the U.K., Canada or Australia, all of whom are racing to ease their visa restrictions—these jobs will remain unfilled, putting a strain on American scientific enterprise which would in turn hinder our efforts to respond to COVID-19, threaten our standing as a global leader in science and technology, and slow economic growth.

Immigrants and especially foreign students are a driving force behind the innovation and technology that make the U.S. a great nation. A quarter of entrepreneurs in America are immigrants, and in 2018, nearly 44% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children.<sup>11</sup> Currently, 90% of international graduate students from China and 83% from India remain in the U.S. after graduation, where they start businesses, file patents, and develop American intellectual property to ensure American competitiveness in global R&D. Recognizing this, the Reagan Foundation report also called for easing visa restrictions so these students could stay in the U.S. after completion of their degree programs and contribute their talents to the long-term benefit of American economy. Without the OPT program or the STEM OPT extension, more of these students trained and educated in American universities would return to their home countries, and all of their entrepreneurship and innovations would benefit those countries instead of the United States.

**Suspending or limiting the OPT program or the STEM OPT extension will make it harder for U.S. citizens to find jobs, hurt the U.S. economy, and hand other countries our competitive edge of new businesses and technologies.** We urge you to maintain the OPT program in its entirety. We appreciate your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



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<sup>7</sup> Letter from Rep. Zoe Lofgren to Acting Secretary of Homeland Security (2020, March 24). [Mitigating the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Essential Workers, Students, and Other Individuals Seeking Immigration Benefits](#).

<sup>8</sup> Letter by Rep. Steve Stivers and 20 other Members of Congress to Secretary of State and Acting Secretary of Homeland Security. (2020, June 2). [Regarding benefits of the OPT program and the need to preserve it](#).

<sup>9</sup> Business Roundtable. (2018). [The Economic Impact Of Curbing The Optional Practical Training Program](#).

<sup>10</sup> Zavodny, M. (2019). [International Students, Stem OPT And The U.S. Stem Workforce](#). National Foundation For American Policy.

<sup>11</sup> See Business Roundtable (2018).

On behalf of:

Baylor University Graduate Student Association  
Brandeis University Graduate Student Association  
Brown University Graduate Student Council  
Caltech Graduate Student Council  
Carnegie Mellon University Graduate Student Assembly and Undergraduate Student Senate  
Case Western Reserve University Graduate Student Council  
Graduate Student Government, Colorado School of Mines  
Cornell Graduate and Professional Student Assembly  
Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY's Graduate Student Council  
Dartmouth University Graduate Student Council  
Drexel University Graduate Student Association  
Duke University Graduate and Professional Student Council  
Fordham Graduate Student Association  
Georgia Tech Graduate Student Government Association  
Harvard University GSAS Student Council  
Graduate and Professional Student Senate Executive Committee, Iowa State University  
Louisiana State University Graduate Students' Council  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate Student Council and Undergraduate Association  
Miami University Graduate Student Association  
Graduate Student Government of Michigan Technological University  
New York University, Student Government Assembly  
Northeastern University Graduate Student Government  
Ohio State University Council of Graduate Students  
Graduate and Professional Student Government Association, Oklahoma State University  
Pacific University Professional Student Senate  
Penn State Graduate and Professional Student Association  
Graduate Student Government of Princeton University  
Rice University Graduate and Undergraduate Student Associations  
Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science Graduate Student Association  
Rutgers Graduate Student Association  
Rutgers University-Newark Graduate Student Governing Association  
Graduate Student Council at Stevens Institute of Technology  
Syracuse University Graduate Student Organization  
Graduate Student Organization, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
The University of Texas at Austin Graduate Student Assembly  
University of Arizona, Graduate and Professional Student Council  
University of Arkansas at Fayetteville Graduate-Professional Student Congress  
Graduate Student Association of University of Arkansas Little Rock  
University of California, Davis Graduate Student Association  
Associated Graduate Students of University of California, Irvine  
University of California, Los Angeles Graduate Student Association  
University of California, San Diego Graduate Student Association Executive Committee  
University of Chicago Graduate Council

University of Colorado Boulder United Government of Graduate Students  
Graduate Student Senate, University of Connecticut  
University of Delaware Graduate Student Government  
University of Florida Graduate Student Council  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Graduate Student Organization  
Graduate and Professional Student Association, University of Idaho  
University of Illinois at Chicago Graduate Student Council  
University of Kansas Medical Center Graduate Student Council Executive Committee  
University of Louisville Graduate Student Council  
University of Maryland Baltimore Graduate Student Association  
University of Maryland College Park Graduate Student Government  
University of Massachusetts Lowell Graduate Student Association  
University of Miami Graduate Student Association  
University of Michigan Rackham Student Government and Rackham Graduate International  
Graduate & Professional Student Association, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
University of New Hampshire Graduate Student Senate  
University of New Mexico Graduate and Professional Student Association  
Graduate and Professional Student Federation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
University of North Carolina Charlotte Graduate and Professional Student Government  
University of Notre Dame, Graduate Student Union Executive Board  
University of Oklahoma Graduate Student Senate  
University of Pennsylvania Graduate and Professional Student Assembly  
University of Pittsburgh Graduate & Professional Student Government  
University of Rochester Arts, Sciences & Engineering Graduate Student Association  
University of Rochester Medical Center Graduate Student Society  
University of Southern California Graduate Student Government  
University of Vermont Graduate Student Senate  
Vanderbilt University Graduate Student Council  
Graduate & Professional Student Association, Washington State University

CC:

The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State  
The Honorable Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security  
The Honorable Eugene Scalia, Secretary of Labor  
The Honorable Kelvin Droegemeier, Director, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy  
The Honorable Mick Mulvaney, Director, White House Office of Management and Budget  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, United States House of Representatives  
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader, United States House of Representatives  
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader, United States Senate  
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Minority Leader, United States Senate  
The Honorable Lindsey Graham, Chair, Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
The Honorable Ron Johnson, Chair, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs

The Honorable Gary Peters, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs

The Honorable Roger Wicker, Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Mary Gay Scanlon, Vice-Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Doug Collins, Ranking Member, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Chair, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Ken Buck, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, House Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Bennie Thompson, Chair, House Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Mike Rogers, Ranking Member, House Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chair, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The Honorable Frank Lucas, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The Honorable Haley Stevens, Chair, Subcommittee on Research & Technology, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The Honorable Jim Baird, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research & Technology, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chair, House Committee on Education and Labor

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member, House Committee on Education and Labor

The Honorable Susan Davis, Chair, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment, House Committee on Education and Labor

The Honorable Lloyd Smucker, Chair, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment, House Committee on Education and Labor

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations