

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 1, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write today in support of international students and scholars. We appreciate the information issued by the Department of Homeland Security adjusting rules on online coursework and travel for international students, as well as the decision to process I-765 employment authorization forms using previously submitted biometrics. However, we urge you to provide clarification for current students and scholars who are unable to return home due to the COVID crisis, and to future individuals that are preparing to travel to universities across the United States to study, work, and conduct research.

International students and scholars are a vital part of the community at colleges and universities. We have concerns about the extensions of valid immigration status for individuals who are unable to voluntarily depart the U.S. due to the COVID crisis, thereby triggering a violation of status, and potentially accruing unlawful presence. We request the extension of F, J and M, academic and vocational, student visas for international students and scholars that are graduating or are coming to the end of Optional Practical Training (OPT) or program end date by at least 90 days beyond the end of the national state of emergency.

Colleges and universities, their faculty, and their students are leading local efforts to support front line workers and conduct innovative research. While they plan for future semesters, they have raised serious concerns about incoming students' and scholars' ability to apply for and obtain timely visas amid this crisis. Many of these individuals have already been accepted into Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certified schools. We request additional guidance for both these institutions and the individuals who will need to apply for visas, including F, J, and M visas.

Third, we request additional information about how the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State (DOS) plan to process new F, J, and M visas applications, extensions or changes of status, and OPT applications if offices remain closed. Additionally, we request information about how they plan to deal with the backlog of applications that will need to be processed once offices are reopened after the end of the national state of emergency. As you know, DHS was already dealing with OPT backlogs this past summer, which would be further exacerbated by this global pandemic.

Before this upcoming summer semester commences, we request that a response be sent to the below signatories answering each of the questions presented in this letter. International students and scholars are a vital part of cutting-edge research and our academic communities, and last year contributed almost \$41 billion to our economy. Colleges and universities are fighting on the front lines of the COVID crisis and we cannot afford to lose the value these students and scholars bring to their communities.

Sincerely,


William R. Keating
Member of Congress

/s/
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

/s/
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

/s/
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

/s/
Jim Himes
Member of Congress

/s/
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

/s/
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

/s/

Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

/s/

Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress

/s/

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

/s/

Ed Case
Member of Congress

/s/

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

/s/

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

/s/

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

/s/

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

/s/

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

/s/

Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/

Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

/s/

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

/s/

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

/s/

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

/s/

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

/s/

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress