

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 30, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our concerns regarding a recently implemented U.S. State Department policy that decreases the validity period of entry visas for Chinese graduate students studying in the fields of aviation, high-tech manufacturing, and robotics at U.S. colleges and universities from 60 months to 12 months. This change is one among numerous other visa and immigration policy changes applied over the past year and a half that are making it increasingly difficult for U.S. higher education institutions to attract the best and brightest students and scholars from around the world. We share your commitment to protect the security of U.S. innovation, but solely focusing restrictions on Chinese students studying in certain technical fields absent any concrete evidence of wrongdoing wrongly stigmatizes them en masse as a national security threat.

The more than one million international students and scholars studying and conducting research in the United States benefit U.S. higher education institutions and businesses, as well as the American people. According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, international students contributed \$36.9 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 450,000 jobs during the 2017 academic year.<sup>1</sup> We are in a global competition for academic talent, and it is imperative that we avoid policies that deter talented international students and scholars from choosing U.S. institutions for their academic pursuits. The United States is already losing its market share of internationally mobile students, as other countries like Canada and Australia aggressively pursue visa and immigration policies that welcome students and scholars to their colleges and universities. The Council of Graduate Schools reported that first-time international graduate enrollment in the United States dropped last fall, the first such decline in over 10 years;<sup>2</sup> further declines will have negative impacts on our country.

International students and scholars are vigorously vetted, particularly those studying in scientific and technical fields, and there are security redundancies built in to the visa process. Unlike all other immigrants and nonimmigrants, all international students and scholars are continuously tracked through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Student and

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<sup>1</sup> NAFSA: Association of International Educators, International Student Economic Value Tool (Nov. 2017) available at: <http://www.nafsa.org/economicvalue>.

<sup>2</sup> Council on Graduate Schools, *International Graduate Admissions Survey Fall 2017* (Jan. 2018) available at: <http://cgsnet.org/international-graduate-admissions-survey>.

Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) from the moment they are admitted to a U.S. college or university until the moment they complete their study or research program. U.S. colleges and universities also comply extensively with export control laws and regulations, which require additional vetting of international students and scholars engaging with certain research or technology on campus.

Limiting the entry visa period to 12 months for Chinese students in certain technical fields forces them to forgo opportunities outside the United States during their studies as they would need to renew their visas in order to return and continue their studies or research. This means missing the opportunity to make a trip home for an important family event, like a wedding or funeral, present at academic conferences abroad, or even pursue study abroad experiences like their domestic counterparts. With the timeliness of the U.S. visa process uncertain, they risk being stuck for months outside the United States waiting for their visa to be renewed, missing out on vital coursework and research. With this change coming right at the start of visa application season for international students and scholars, many may well choose to study or conduct research elsewhere to avoid such potential interruptions.

The reality is the 350,000 Chinese students studying in the United States are making significant contributions to medical research, biomedical engineering, nanotechnology, computer science, and solar energy fields, among other benefits. Chinese students are also helping to educate future generations of U.S. students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Chinese students alone contributed \$12 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2016-2017 academic year,<sup>3</sup> so even a modest decline in Chinese enrollment would be devastating to local communities and campuses who benefit from their presence. We absolutely must protect our economic and national security. However, in the process, we must not blanketly target all Chinese students as national security threats and jeopardize the important contributions they make to our economy and our country.

International students and scholars are essential to U.S. academic, economic, and foreign policy leadership. If students, particularly from strategic regions in the world, no longer come here, we will lose the ability for our country to build relationships with future political, economic, and scientific leaders in other countries and to strengthen our own national security. In light of these facts, we urge the Department to reconsider this policy change and restore the entry visa validity period for these Chinese students to the full 60 months.


Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

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<sup>3</sup> NAFSA, International Economic Value Tool, available at <http://www.nafsa.org/economicvalue>; U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs & Institute of International Education, *Open Doors Report*, (Nov. 2017), available at: <https://www.iie.org/opendoors> [Dollar contribution of Chinese students based on percentage share of enrollment at U.S. higher education institutions during the 2016-2017 academic year (32.5%), as reported by the *Open Doors Report* by the Institute of International Education in partnership with the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs].

Sincerely,

  
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Member of Congress

  
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PRAMILA JAYAPAL  
Member of Congress

  
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DAVID N. CICILLINE  
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Member of Congress

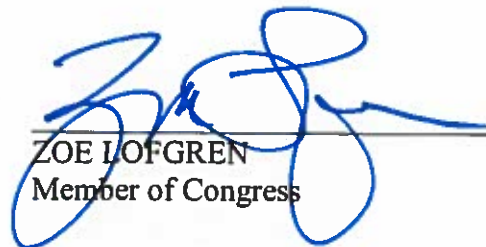
  
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KEITH ELLISON  
Member of Congress

  
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