October 30, 2013

Speaker of the House John Boehner
United States House of Representatives
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner,

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) and the more than 600,000 graduate and professional students we represent across the United States on more than 90 campuses. I wish to express my sincere gratitude for all you have done to find a bipartisan solution to our nation’s immigration problems. I also write to request that you consider H.R. 15, a bill very similar to the bi-partisan immigration bill passed in the Senate earlier this year.

Our nation boasts the finest opportunities for higher education in the world. Thus, it is no surprise that we attract the best and brightest international students to our institutions of higher education. In 2011, approximately 15% of graduate students were foreign nationals and these numbers continue to increase as universities accept an increasing number of international students.1,2

Our nation’s international graduate and professional students are members of our communities, leaders within their universities, and contributors to the growth and development of our nation. In 2011, 36% of all science and engineering PhDs were awarded to foreign nationals at U.S. universities. In 2011–2012 international students contributed $21.8 billion to the U.S. economy and $717.3 million to the state of Ohio.3 At the same time, 76% of all patents from America’s top 10 patent-generating universities had a foreign born inventor.4 Additionally, businesses founded by immigrants—in many cases graduate and professional students—contribute $1.3 billion annually to the Ohio economy.5

NAGPS supports comprehensive immigration reform that values the contributions made by our nation’s international and undocumented DREAM Act students. NAGPS believes that 2013 is the year to improve our immigration system by passing comprehensive immigration reform that will advance our nation economically and intellectually. Estimates show that passing comprehensive immigration reform would add more than $766 million to the Gross State Product of Ohio in 2014.6 NAGPS wishes to express our platform and requests that you bring H.R. 15 to a vote in the House of Representative’s floor and consider the following recommendations:

1) Allow for domestic renewal of type F student visas.

Currently Section 4103(c) of H.R. 15 allows for the renewal of a number of visa types within the United States. Unfortunately, this subsection does not include type F student visas. Allowing domestic renewal of type F visas would circumvent the unnecessary time and financial burdens currently required for students to revalidate their academic visas. Currently, many students are prevented from presenting the results of their research at international conferences because of the costs of associated with visa renewal.7 Allowing for student visa renewals in the United States could minimize costs associated with visa renewals overseas and allow for more robust security and oversight of visa renewals within the United States. The experience and expertise of domestic State Department and Department of Homeland Security officials provides for greater security throughout the visa revaluation process. Providing F visa holders with the option of domestic revalidation also has the potential to drastically reduce the cost and workload on our consulates abroad.
2) Increase the number of H1-B visas for U.S. educated foreign nationals.
Currently, the number of H1-B visas available to U.S. educated foreign nationals with advanced degrees is inadequate. While nearly three-fourths of all foreign doctoral recipients plan to contribute to the growth of the American economy by working in the U.S., the five and ten year stay rates for these students are estimated at 64% and 66%, respectively. Visa caps have consistently been reached in recent years, and only a small portion of green cards go to professionals with advanced degrees. We encourage you to expand the number of H1-B visas and green cards available for foreign nationals that receive an advanced degree in the United States. We support the measures in H.R. 15 that raises the H1-B visa cap from 65,000 to a fluctuating cap that ranges from 115,000 to 180,000 based on market demand and unemployment data.

3) Recognize the contribution of DREAM Act eligible students.
Because of their status, persons brought to the United States who are denied a path to citizenship are also denied the opportunity to pursue an education in America's public and private institutions of higher learning. The U.S. is in turn denied the potential economic and social benefits that would be generated from such an education. These persons deserve the opportunity to work and contribute to the country they consider home, as American citizens. We encourage you to support legislation that provides a pathway to citizenship similar to the one laid out in H.R. 15.

Thank you again for your continued efforts to move our nation forward with comprehensive immigration reform. Should you wish to speak with NAGPS further regarding graduate and professional student issues please don’t hesitate to contact me.

With sincere thanks,

Meredith Niles
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