



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

June 13, 2013

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Alexander,

I'm writing this letter 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 at more than 90 institutions. NAGPS has worked to ensure that our nation's international students and undocumented students earning advanced degrees have the opportunity to remain in the United States to contribute to our national security and economy.

Increasing opportunities for international students with advanced degrees to remain in the United States can provide an important economic benefit for our nation. In recent years, the continued growth of international students coming to the U.S. for higher education has had a significant positive economic impact on the United States. International students contributed nearly \$22 billion to the U.S. economy in 2012¹ and nearly \$213 million to the state of Tennessee. We support the measures in the bill to increase the number of green cards and H1B visas available to individuals with advanced degrees. We are also in favor of the shortened time to citizenship for DREAM Act students. However, we believe the bill can be strengthened and have outlined specific requests and proposed amendments to S.744 below.

1) Allow for student visa renewal within the United States

Currently Section 4103 (c)(2) of S.744 allows for the renewal of a number of visas within the United States. Unfortunately, this does not include type F and J student visas. Renewing visas can be extremely costly and time consuming for international students. Currently, they are obligated to travel back to their home countries because there is no option to renew visas within the United States. We are seeking an amendment to the bill that would allow student visa renewals within the United States. This bill could minimize costs associated with visa renewals overseas, and more importantly, 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 revalidation process. Providing F and J visa holders with the option of domestic revalidation also has the potential to drastically reduce the cost and workload on our foreign consulates.

2) Allow international student travel for professional development

In addition to visa renewals, international students face problems with professional development outside the United States during their time of study. They are often unable to attend international conferences because of visa restrictions or fear that they will not be able to re-enter the country. This prevents many talented individuals from presenting the results of their research and improving their professional development². Since many international students will remain in the United States and contribute to our economy, it is in the best interest of our nation to allow them the greatest opportunities to improve their professional experience. Therefore, we urge you to consider an amendment that allows for provisions within a student visa for professional development outside the United States.

NAGPS member schools:

Arizona State University
Arkansas State University
Armstrong Atlantic State University
Auburn University
Baylor University
Bentley University
Boston University
Bryn Mawr College
Carnegie Mellon University
Case Western Reserve University
Chatham University
Colorado School of Mines
Colorado State University
Columbia University
Cornell University
Drexel University
Duke University
East Carolina University
East Tennessee State University
Eastern Illinois University
Emerson College
Florida Atlantic University
Florida International University
Florida State University
George Mason University
Grand Valley State University
Harvard University
High Point University
Johns Hopkins University
Kent State University
Loyola University Maryland
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Missouri University of Science and Technology
North Carolina State University
Northern Arizona University
Northwestern University
Ohio State University
Oklahoma State University
Old Dominion University
Pennsylvania State University
Regent University
Rice University
Southern University
St. Cloud State University
St. Louis University
Stony Brook University
Syracuse University
Texas A&M University
Texas Tech University
Tufts University
University of Akron
University of Alabama, Birmingham
University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas, Little Rock
University of California
University of California, Davis
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Merced
University of California, San Diego
University of Central Florida
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Louisville
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
University of Maryland, College Park
University of Miami
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri
University of Missouri, St. Louis
University of Montana
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
University of Nevada, Reno
University of New England
University of New Haven
University of North Texas
University of Notre Dame
University of Oklahoma
University of Pittsburgh
University of Puerto Rico Rio Piedras Campus
University of South Dakota
University of South Florida
University of Southern California
University of Tennessee Knoxville
University of Toledo
Virginia Commonwealth University
Washington State University
Washington University in St. Louis
Western Michigan University
Xavier University

3) Utilize a STEM definition that includes the biological sciences

Currently, S. 744 does not include the biological or biomedical sciences within the definition of Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). NAGPS strongly supports a STEM definition in line with the one currently used by The Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In April 2008, foreign students who graduated from a United States institution of higher education with certain STEM degrees became eligible for an extended period of optional practical training. This list of STEM degrees, expanded in 2012, is known as the STEM Designated Degree Program List. The DHS STEM list includes the biological sciences and NAGPS supports using this designation in S. 744.

Thank you again for your continued efforts to move our nation forward with comprehensive immigration reform. While many debates remain, history will show that your bipartisan efforts produced a better immigration policy for our nation. Should you wish to speak with NAGPS further regarding graduate and professional student issues please do not hesitate to contact me.

With sincere thanks,



Meredith Niles
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Director of Legislative Affairs, National Association of Graduate-Professional Students

[1] NAFSA Association of International Educators. The Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy Academic Year 2011-2012.
http://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/eis2012/USA.pdf

[2] Chiu, L.S. Visa Delays Put Science Careers at Risk. August 14, 2009. Science Careers Magazine.