



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

**Organization:** National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)

**Contact:** *Madhan K. Arulanandam* | Director of International Student Concerns | [disc@nagps.org](mailto:disc@nagps.org)

*Fang Zhang* | Vice President & COO | [vice-president@nagps.org](mailto:vice-president@nagps.org)

## Statement on Senators' Joint Letter on H-1B and OPT

On May 7th, a joint [letter](#) from Senators Tom Cotton (R-AR), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), and Josh Howely (R-MO) was sent to the White House proposing changes to an array of employment-based immigration programs because of the current COVID-19 crisis. Included in the proposal was the suggestion to suspend the [H-1B visa](#) and [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) program for one year. The rationale provided for suspending these programs is that they will have “taken jobs that would otherwise go to unemployed Americans”. While NAGPS supports serious efforts by the U.S. Congress to put Americans back to work and to strengthen the economy, **we are strongly opposed** to the recommendations made in the Senators’ letter for the following reasons:

1. OPT and H-1B workers will not be in competition with American workers in the job sectors most severely affected by COVID-19.
2. The OPT and H-1B programs create jobs for American workers and contribute to a strong economy. Suspending these programs would be catastrophic to the U.S. economy, job creation, and its global competitiveness.
3. The caliber of higher education in the U.S. would suffer as a result of reduced international student enrollment.

NAGPS recognizes the fact that international students and the workers supported by the OPT and H-1B programs are valuable assets to the U.S., both economically and socially, who create jobs for American workers and help keep the U.S. ahead of its competitors in the global economy. We also believe that the policy ideas presented in the senators’ letter would be severely detrimental for the economy and higher education if implemented.

NAGPS supports earnest efforts to put Americans back to work and to rebuild the economy but we believe that suspending the OPT and H-1B programs will not achieve that goal. According to the [most recent jobs report](#) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) the industries with the most job losses in the U.S. since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic are Accommodation & Food Services, Retail & Trade Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, Administrative & Waste Services, and Manufacturing. International students on OPT and H-1B workers typically work in STEM-related (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics) job sectors and not those sectors most affected by COVID-19. It would,



## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

therefore, be an erroneous endeavor to suspend the OPT and H-1B programs to preserve jobs for American workers since OPT and H-1B workers are typically not in competition with Americans for those jobs.

The H-1B and OPT programs do, however, play a critical role in job creation and economic growth in the U.S. by attracting and retaining talented international students and workers. According [to a 2017 study](#) by The Silicon Valley Competitiveness and Innovation Project, foreign-born workers “help fill a critical worker shortage that has allowed US firms to remain strong and created thousands of jobs for US workers.” In 2018, nearly half a million jobs were created and supported by students with temporary visas, and nearly 25% of billion-dollar startups have at least one founder who was an international student. Furthermore, international students and scholars contributed an estimated \$41 [billion](#) to the U.S. economy last fiscal year alone. Supporting the OPT and H-1B programs and the international graduates and workers they attract is a means of economic growth and job creation for American workers and [not a means to take jobs away from Americans](#).

Suspending the H-1B and OPT programs would also add to the steadily decreasing international student enrollment rates in U.S. universities and colleges. This decreased presence of international students and scholars would pose a particular threat to our higher education system as teaching and research in academic programs would suffer. In 2016, it was estimated that international students [subsidized American public higher education](#) by an estimated \$9 billion annually. Reduced international student enrollment would likely lead to a reduction in scholarships and institutional support for domestic students that are subsidized by tuition from international students. The end result would be an overall reduction in the caliber of U.S. higher education; the effects of which will only be borne by American college students in the future.

As the U.S. is recovering from the COVID-19 crisis we look to our elected officials to implement policies that will place the U.S. on the path to recovery, economically and otherwise. Supporting programs like OPT and H-1B that attract and retain international students and workers is a proven method of creating jobs and strengthening the economy. NAGPS, therefore, urges legislators and policy makers to continue to support these programs. We also welcome the opportunity to speak with Senators Cotton, Cruz, Grassley, and Hawley about the importance of supporting international education, and programs like OPT and H-1B. We will continue to engage with our legislators, policy-makers, and constituents, to ensure that graduate-professional students and higher education are being supported.