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July 13, 2020

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

Mr. Matthew T. Albence
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Director Albence:

As members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), we write to express our concern regarding modifications to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) announced by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on July 6, 2020. This announcement stipulates that international students who are attending universities and institutions of higher learning cannot take their classes entirely online and maintain their student visa status. International students are integral to our institutions of higher learning and forcing students to go back to their home countries if they cannot meet this requirement or forcing universities and colleges to risk the health of their communities is simply unjust and will disproportionately impact Asian students enrolled in these institutions.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, some institutions of higher education and learning have canceled in person classes and are planning to hold virtual classes in the fall to ensure the safety of students, faculty and other personnel on campus in accordance with recommendations made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ Many institutions are still formulating policies and procedures, as many parts of the country are still facing rapid spread of COVID-19. This abrupt change in policy is causing many international students to have to make decisions about their future without knowing the full impact of their choice. Students may come from countries with ongoing travel restrictions due to the pandemic, or stem from communities without access to the technology needed to pursue an online course of study. Further, it is not clear if students will be able to come back into the United States to finish their degrees on their current visas or if they will be able to complete their degrees from abroad. This policy also creates great uncertainty regarding future employment opportunities for these students.

¹ "Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 30 May 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html>

Over 65 percent of international students in the United States are from Asian countries,² the largest share coming from China, India and South Korea. In the 2018-2019 school year, the total number of international students in the United States was 1.1 million individuals. 33.7 percent came from China, 18.4 percent from India, and 4.8 percent from South Korea. In addition, thousands of students also came from Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Pakistan. These international students play a vital role in strengthening the American economy, contributing nearly \$41 billion and creating or supporting 458,290 U.S. jobs in the 2018-2019 academic year alone.³ They also play an important role in diversifying college campuses and exposing U.S. born students to cultures and experiences they might not otherwise be exposed to. International students can also bolster the education of their peers by preparing them to compete in a global workforce.

Asian immigrants also play a critical role in the U.S. economy and are the fastest growing immigrant population in the United States. More than 25 percent of all recent Asian American immigrants work in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM) fields helping to drive American innovation, research and cutting-edge technological achievements. They are also an important component in the U.S. healthcare sector. Foreign born Asian Americans are more than 40 percent more likely to work as registered nurses and twice as likely to work as physicians or surgeons as similarly educated native-born Americans. They also disproportionately serve rural communities where the need for more healthcare professionals is high. As we grapple through an unprecedented pandemic, it is more vital than ever before that we have qualified individuals in STEM and healthcare fields to help create a vaccine and treatment methods for this virus and to help our economy recover from this crisis.

This latest announcement by ICE is prejudiced and will hurt the U.S. economy further at a time when we are already in a recession. We urge that you rescind this policy as soon as possible and ensure that international students can maintain their visas as their academic institutions plan for the upcoming school year in a way that upholds the public health of all students, faculty, and staff.

Sincerely,



Judy Chu
CAPAC Chair
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
CAPAC Immigration Task Force Chair
Member of Congress

² Open Doors. (2019). *International Students in the United States* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from: <https://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/Fast-Facts>

³ NAFSA (2019). *The United States of America Benefits from International Students* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/isev-2019.pdf>

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