

May 2, 2019

Honorable Members of the New Jersey Congressional Delegation:

As presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities throughout New Jersey, we are writing to express our concern about obstacles we are facing in our efforts to attract and retain international students, faculty, and scholars. Our schools vary in mission, size and the makeup of our student bodies, but we all depend on our ability to attract motivated students and scholars from throughout society and around the world. We believe our success in these endeavors plays an important role in building the State's innovation economy.

Over the past several years, we have observed a disturbing increase in the number – and length – of impediments put in the path of our international students, faculty, and staff. Some of our schools have experienced decreases in foreign student enrollment and all of our schools have encountered an increasingly log-jammed immigration system that is impacting our ability to recruit, retain, and bring to our campuses foreign talent.

Simply put, as it becomes more difficult for foreign students and academics to study and work in the United States, many of them are turning to other options, weakening not just our individual institutions, but American higher education as a whole, and, by extension, our country's global competitiveness.

Some examples:

- **Administrative processing delays:** In a number of recent cases, graduate students and faculty members have been forced to miss or defer entire semesters because their visa applications were mired in “administrative processing” at the State Department. Administrative processing is the time period outside of “normal” processing times in which cases that appear to meet the basic eligibility requirements are referred for additional background checks. Visa applicants are generally not provided with any explanations, nor are they told how long the additional processing may last. This situation creates untenable uncertainty for the visa applicant, the employer, and other affected parties, especially as anecdotal reports indicate an increase in the amount of time that cases are remaining in this category. This can be especially problematic for foreign students and academics, whose commitments in the U.S. align with an established academic calendar.
- **Processing delays for Optional Practical Training:** Optional Practical Training (OPT) permits foreign students studying in the U.S. to apply for “practical training” with a U.S. employer in a job directly related to their course of study. The program allows students to supplement their education with valuable experiential learning and on-the-job-training as they start their careers. Unfortunately, processing times for OPT applications have increased from a previous maximum of 90 days in 2016 to 3½ - 5½ months today. Processing times in this range create an enormous burden for students. The consequence of these delays is that students are unable to begin their job or program on time and, in

many instances, they may lose out on the position altogether. This harms not only the students, but also the employers seeking to hire qualified, U.S.-trained workers for a practical training opportunity.

- **Increased Requests for Evidence:** Over the past year, employers seeking to hire foreign-born employees have seen a dramatic increase in the number of “Requests for Evidence” (RFEs) from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), particularly for H-1B visas, which allow U.S. employers to hire highly-skilled foreign workers in specialty occupations. We understand that USCIS has a responsibility to ensure that it has necessary information about eligibility; we do not doubt that some of these requests are warranted. The scope of the increase, however, is staggering. RFEs for H-1B visa petitions more than doubled between the third and fourth quarters of FY 2017. These requests delay the issuance of visas for employers by months and boost legal costs. Meanwhile, our professors and other employees are putting their lives on hold as they wait for start-dates.

The types of situations described above rarely make front-page news and the isolated impact of each example is certainly not as dramatic as the effect of higher-profile actions such as the rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program or the travel ban. However, taken together, they create a frustrating and sometimes hostile environment for those wishing to live in and contribute to our communities. This cumulative effect is acutely felt at our colleges and universities, where we depend on the free flow of talent to help fulfill our teaching and research missions.

Our experiences over the past several years are reflected in the findings of two recent reports by the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) and the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). The [AILA analysis](#) of USCIS data found that the total time it takes the federal government to process foreign visas has increased by 46 percent over the past two fiscal years. Meanwhile, the Council of Graduate Schools [found](#) that new enrollments of international students at U.S. graduate schools have fallen for the second year in a row. The CGS report comes on top of a 2018 survey by the Institute of International Education, which [found](#) that new foreign student enrollment for undergraduate programs in the U.S. has decreased by 8.9 percent since the 2015-16 school year.

Needless to say, we are very concerned about the findings in these reports. For decades, U.S. academia has been the envy of the world, in part because of our recruitment and acceptance of the finest applicants from around the globe. It has also been an engine of American innovation, bringing together talent from across the nation and around the world to work on the discoveries that fuel our most cutting-edge economic sectors. Our students, both foreign and U.S.-born, are able to learn from the world’s best professors and conduct research under the tutelage of the most creative minds in their field. These students, in turn, join the workforce, enter public service, and become educators or researchers themselves. Eventually, their children attend our colleges and universities, and become productive members of society.

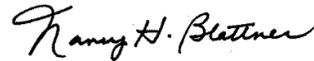
As the 116th Congress moves forward, we ask that you closely monitor the policies and administrative actions that are threatening the free flow of students and scholars upon which our

colleges and universities depend. We appreciate all your work on these issues and hope that you will continue to let foreign-born individuals on our campuses and throughout the State know that people of all backgrounds and nationalities will always be welcome in New Jersey.

Sincerely,



Richard A. Levao
President
Bloomfield College



Nancy H. Blattner, Ph.D.
President
Caldwell University



Rosalind Reichard
Interim President
Centenary University



Kathryn A. Foster
President
College of New Jersey



Helen J. Streubert
President
College of Saint Elizabeth



MaryAnn Baenninger
President
Drew University



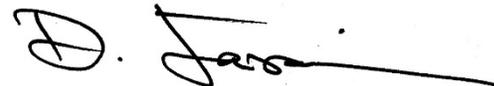
Christopher A. Capuano, Ph.D.
President
Fairleigh Dickinson University



Anne M. Prisco, Ph.D.
President
Felician University



Dr. Joseph R. Marbach
President
Georgian Court University



Dawood Farahi, Ph.D.
President
Kean University



Grey J. Dimenna
President
Monmouth University



Susan A. Cole, Ph.D.
President
Montclair State University



Sue Henderson
President
New Jersey City University



Joel S. Bloom
President
New Jersey Institute of Technology



Christopher L. Eisgruber
President
Princeton University



Peter P. Mercer
President
Ramapo College



Gregory G. Dell'Omo
President
Rider University



Ali A. Houshmand
President
Rowan University



Robert Barchi
President
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey



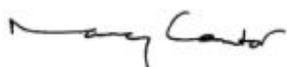
Brian L. Strom, M.D., M.P.H.
Chancellor
Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences



Phoebe A. Haddon, J.D., LL.M.
Chancellor
Rutgers University–Camden



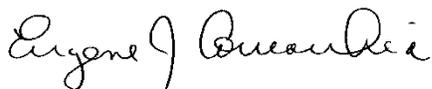
Christopher J. Molloy
Chancellor
Rutgers University–New Brunswick



Nancy Cantor
Chancellor
Rutgers University–Newark



Mary J. Meehan, Ph.D.
Interim President
Seton Hall University



Eugene J. Cornacchia
President
St. Peter's University



Nariman Farvardin
President
Stevens Institute of Technology



Harvey Kesselman
President
Stockton University



Merodie A. Hancock, Ph.D.
President
Thomas Edison State University



Richard J. Helldobler
President
William Paterson University

CC The Honorable Philip D. Murphy
Governor of New Jersey