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TIM RYAN
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
13TH DISTRICT, OHIO

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
LEGISLATIVE BRANCH SUBCOMMITTEE
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DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE
MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERAN AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES SUBCOMMITTEE

July 2, 2020

RECEIVED

By ESEC External at 12:52 pm, Jul 02, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write today to express my serious concerns regarding the recent decision to continue restrictions on certain educational visa programs, particularly the Optional Practical Training (OPT) Program. I am worried about both short- and long-term repercussions this could have not only for our nation's schools and businesses but for our ability to recruit the world's talent to strengthen our institutions and economy.

At a time of major change in the global economy, it is vital that our institutions are able to continue to be internationally competitive. Attracting and retaining top international students is an important component of globally leading business and education sectors. It is equally imperative that Ohio businesses, both large and small and encompassing a diverse array of industries, continue to have access to a highly skilled Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) workforce.

In Ohio, international students are working side-by-side on the front lines and within research labs in the fight against COVID-19, and their immense contributions will continue with the post-pandemic economic recovery as well. International students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$41 billion and supported 458,290 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2018-2019 academic year. That amounts to a \$1.3 billion financial contribution from international students, supporting 14,575 jobs.

Contrary to your administration's claim that immigration will increase job competition for native-born citizens, study after study shows no evidence to support claims that the OPT program reduces job opportunities for U.S. workers. Instead, the facts suggest that U.S. employers are more likely to turn to foreign student workers when U.S. workers are scarcer. In other words, the economic case for encouraging international students to come to America is strong, while the argument for restricting such students and their ability to work in the United States is weak.

Our country's international students, scholars and professionals contribute substantially to our state's culture and economy. These remarkable individuals, and their families, enrich the fabric of our learning environment and bring extraordinary talent and valuable global perspective to our local communities. I urge you to abandon this reckless policy decision and to continue to support the OPT program.

Sincerely,

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

July 14, 2020

The Honorable Tim Ryan
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Ryan:

Thank you for your July 2, 2020 letter expressing your support for international students, scholars and professionals. Acting Secretary Wolf asked that I respond on his behalf.

In your letter, you note that in a time of major change in the global economy, it is vital that our educational institutions remain competitive. To that end, you state the benefits of our international educational programs, including Optional Practical Training (OPT).

The Department of Homeland Security has no greater responsibility than ensuring the safety and security of our country. Responding to the pandemic requires everyone to work within rapidly changing, complex circumstances that create a variety of situations and conditions unique to individuals and communities. We recognize that there are immigration-related challenges that individuals, including students and scholars, as well as employers and others face as a direct result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic national emergency. We carefully analyze these issues and leverage our resources to effectively address these challenges within our existing authorities.

With regard to visa issuance and consular processing for individuals outside of the United States, we defer to our colleagues at the Department of State. For aliens within the United States, it is important for us to emphasize that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to accept and process benefit requests from the foreign student population such as extension of stay and change of status applications, as well as applications for employment authorization (including OPT).

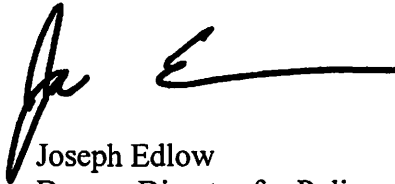
We work closely with our colleagues at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to coordinate on issues affecting international students. ICE has online resources related to students, including responses to frequently asked questions about the impact of COVID-19 on Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certified schools and the various scenarios that students and scholars may encounter, including issues related to OPT. Both the ICE and USCIS websites and outreach efforts provide guidance, resources, and information to the public on the actions and policies we are implementing through these uncertain times.¹

¹ For policy updates, operational changes, and COVID-19 information, please visit uscis.gov/coronavirus (USCIS) and ice.gov/coronavirus (ICE SEVP).

The Honorable Tim Ryan
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Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Edlow', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy