

June 4, 2026

Joseph B. Edlow, Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Director Edlow:

On behalf of the American Council on Education and the undersigned major higher-education associations, we write to ask that the current administrative hold, started in December 2025, be lifted for the purpose of processing Optional Practical Training (OPT), H-1B, and other work authorizations issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for international students currently holding valid status and in the United States.¹ We also continue to ask that the administration consider exempting nonimmigrant visas from the current travel bans, as we requested in September 2025, as that was the policy carried out by the first Trump administration in 2017.²

As partners with the federal government in addressing national security concerns, we understand the need to safeguard the security and safety of the United States by ensuring adequate screening of foreign nationals for visas and work authorizations. International students studying in the United States in F, J, or M status have already been through an extensive vetting process, including an application, interview, screening for security concerns, and a social media review.² Further, throughout their time studying here, international students are monitored by the hosting institution of higher education and the Department of Homeland Security's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.³ This process means that the federal government has extensive screening and vetting information for students under F, J, and M visas, as well as the ability to track those students while they are in this country.

International students have long been important to the American higher education system and to our nation's economy. In the 2024-2025 school year, the United States hosted nearly 1.2 million international students. These students contributed \$42.9 billion to the U.S. economy and supported over 350,000 jobs.⁴ Further, international students contribute to our country's strength and global competitiveness, especially in emerging fields. Forty-two percent of the top Artificial Intelligence companies were founded by international students who studied in the United States.⁵ Providing the

¹ December 2, 2025. USCIS "Hold and Review of all Pending Asylum Applications and all USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from High-Risk Countries"; <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-alerts/PM-602-0192-PendingApplicationsHighRiskCountries-20251202.pdf>

² July 22, 2025. The University of Texas at Dallas "New Visa Vetting Process For F, M, J Applicants"; <https://isso.utdallas.edu/2025/07/22/new-visa-vetting-process-for-f-m-j-applicants/>

³ Accessed May 27, 2026. Immigration and Customs Enforcement "Student and Exchange Visitor Information System"; <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/overview>

⁴ Accessed May 27, 2026. NAFSA: Association of International Educators "Economic Value Statistics"; <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2>

⁵ November 2025. NAFSA: Association of International Educators "Sharpening Our Edge: Enhancing U.S. Competitiveness"; https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Sharpening-Our-Edge-Global-Talent-Edits-Nov%202025_FINAL.pdf

opportunity for these students to stay in the country through OPT or H-1B ensures they can continue contributing to our nation.

Given the importance of international students and the talent they bring to our country, as well as their value to the economy, we ask that those in F, J, and M status be exempted from the adjudicative hold on work authorization for OPT and H-1B applicants, similar to the exemption that has already been provided for medical professionals.⁶ We welcome the opportunity to meet with your staff to discuss the importance of these students to America and ensure they are able to continue contributing to our nation's economy and national strength.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Mitchell".

Ted Mitchell, President

On behalf of:

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Council on Education
Association of American Law Schools
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Complete College America
Council of Graduate Schools
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Educational Testing Service (ETS)
EDUCAUSE
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education

⁶ March 30, 2026 "Update on USCIS' Strengthened Screening and Vetting": <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/update-on-uscis-strengthened-screening-and-vetting>