



May 19, 2020

CALIFORNIA CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of over 285,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students at the University of California, we express our strongest objection to the letter submitted by Senators Cotton, Cruz, Grassley, and Hawley on May 7th calling for the suspension of the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program.

The OPT program is the only avenue for international students to work and contribute to the U.S. economy post-graduation, offering students one to three years of temporary employment authorization and allowing various industries to recruit highly-skilled international graduates for the areas of the workforce that cannot be filled otherwise. The OPT program should continue to be a priority for our country now more than ever, as it is vital to increasing our workforce diversity, driving critical health research, and stimulating the economy for California and the U.S. in the path to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We agree with the respected senators in calling to attention the need to invest in American jobs and American economy: according to the US Department of Commerce, international students contributed \$45 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018 alone.¹ Last year, international students helped create over 458,000 jobs, three jobs for every seven international students who study here.² A recent report by the National Foundation for American Policy (NEAP) estimated that nearly one in four billion-dollar American start-ups were created by a founder who studied in the United States as an international student.³

We also agree that our country needs to be conscious of how we support recovery efforts in the wake of this pandemic. A substantial share of STEM workers in the U.S. are foreign-born. Areas with more foreign-born STEM workers have higher patenting rates and faster productivity growth, which translates into direct financial resources for the surrounding communities. Restricting OPT would lead to a 0.15 percentage increase in unemployment by 2020, with a total job loss of 443,000 positions, of which native-born workers will see a 255,000 job reduction by 2028.⁴

Finally, we believe it is absolutely crucial for Congress to consider the impact that any changes to OPT would have on our state and our higher education institutions. More than one out of every five OPT participants is employed in California.⁵ At the University of California, the community's financial contributions through tuition and fees, which stand at three times those

¹ <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/Economic-Impact-of-International-Students>

² <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/losing-talent-economic-and-foreign-policy-risk-america-cant-ign>

³ <https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/International-Students-STEM-OPT-And-The-US-STEM-Workforce.NFAP.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.businessroundtable.org/policy-perspectives/immigration/economic-impact-curbing-optional-practical-training-pro>

⁵ https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2019/03/OPT.pdf



of resident students', allow us to fund key campus services and thus keep Californians' tuition at the lowest level possible. To eliminate a basic opportunity like OPT would likely result in severe under-enrollment that would exacerbate our university's fiscal circumstances.

We hope this letter expresses our and many others' unequivocal support of OPT. The answer to protecting our economy and American jobs is not restricting or rescinding OPT, but rather enhancing and expanding it. OPT is vital to the diversity and stability of California's economic and social growth. Efforts to curtail OPT would diminish California's role in the global economy and inhibit its economic recovery. We request Congress to make every effort to make sure the OPT program is supported and continues to provide the pathway for an economically prosperous future.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. If you have questions, please contact UC Student Association Policy Director Ashraf Beshay. He can be reached at (510) 282-0984 or by email at policy@ucsa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Varsha Sarveshwar".

Varsha Sarveshwar
President, UC Student Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connor Strobel".

Connor Strobel
President, UC Graduate and Professional Council