**Template Letter to Congress on the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 for Higher Ed Institutions**[[1]](#footnote-0)

March 19, 2021

The Presidents’ Alliance developed this template letter to Congress for institutions of higher education to adapt and send to their U.S. Senate and House delegations in support of the [U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021](https://www.aila.org/infonet/senate-bill-us-citizenship-act), which includes comprehensive and long-awaited reforms to the immigration system, many of which affect higher education, including: (a) a broad earned roadmap to citizenship; (b) an expedited path for Dreamers and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders; (c) the repeal of Section 505, reducing barriers for states to expand in-state tuition to noncitizens; (d) creation of dual intent for international students; (e) more green cards for STEM PhD international graduates; and (f) the removal of the per country cap for employment-based visas. The bill was introduced in February by Sen. Menendez (D-NJ) in the Senate and Rep. Sánchez (D-CA) in the House. The goal of this document is to provide a template for institutions to share their support for such legislation with your state delegations in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, individually or as a coalition of institutions from your state.

We recommend the following steps:

1. **Draft.** You may wish to identify a small working group of public and private colleges and universities in your state and collaborate with them to customize the letter for your state by deleting this cover page and customizing the rest of the letter. If you prefer to send a letter as an individual institution, delete this cover page and customize the rest of the letter.

2. **Circulate.** Circulate the final draft letter to all higher educational institutions in your state inviting additional signatories. We are happy to assist with the circulation.

3. **Transmit.** Work with a government relations officer at one of the institutions or a state higher education association to transmit the final letter to all U.S. Senators and Members of Congress who represent your state.

4. **Publicize.** Share the letter with the Presidents’ Alliance at [info@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:info@presidentsalliance.org) and publicly share the letter through a press statement, regular media, and social media.

Institutions can and should edit any portion of the below letter. Be sure to edit and customize the terms in [brackets] and highlighted in yellow; customize the letter as much as you see fit.

**Note:** While this template uses the term “Dreamers,” many immigrant youth prefer to not use that term, opting for terms such as “immigrant youth” or “immigrants.” Student advocacy groups in your state may be able to provide useful guidance about the preferred language.

[Date]

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| The Honorable [full Senator name]  U.S. Senate  Washington, D.C. 20002  The Honorable [full Rep name]  U.S. House of Representatives  Washington, D.C. 20003 | The Honorable [full Senator name]  U.S. Senate  Washington, D.C. 20002  The Honorable [full Rep name]  U.S. House of Representatives  Washington, D.C. 20003 |

**RE: REQUEST FROM [STATE] HIGHER ED INSTITUTIONS TO CO-SPONSOR AND SUPPORT THE U.S. CITIZENSHIP ACT OF 2021**

Dear Senators [surname] and [surname] and Representatives [surname] and [surname]:

On behalf of the undersigned higher education institutions, we write to express our full support of the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, introduced this month by Sen. Menendez (D-NJ) in the Senate and Rep. Sánchez (D-CA) in the House, and to urge you to cosponsor and vote in support of this vital legislation. With its comprehensive and long-awaited reforms, this act is a welcome step toward modernizing our immigration system.

We see daily the tremendous value immigrant, refugee, and international students and scholars bring to our campuses and communities. We strongly support the provisions that provide a path to citizenship, protect Dreamers, allow states to invest in the education of *all* their residents, and initiate sensible reforms to our visa and immigration system. The U.S. Citizenship Act introduces a strong foundation for the humane, just, and fair immigration system that we hope to build. We urge you to support this important legislation and highlight below some of the key provisions and possible amendments for higher education.

1. **KEY PROVISIONS BENEFITING THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY**

Among the many important reforms included in the bill, the following will have a particular impact on higher education:

1. **An eight-year path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and a three-year path for DACA recipients, Dreamers, TPS holders, and others**.
2. **Return of state autonomy to invest in higher education for all residents**. Repeals laws making it difficult to extend benefits like in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants, refugees, and asylees, allowing more residents to afford a college degree.[[2]](#footnote-1)
3. **Modernizing our immigration system through dual intent for international students**. Removes an arcane legal requirement requiring students to prove that they have no intention of legally immigrating to the United States after graduation, even as our nation wants to employ them.
4. **Retaining international STEM graduates through increased green cards.** We urge Congress to make green cards available not just for STEM PhDs, but also for those earning master’s, bachelor’s, or associate’s degrees in the wide range of the fields of study needed by U.S. employers.
5. **Removal of country cap for employment-based visas.** Faculty, staff, and recently graduated students from countries with a high number of applicants for employment- based visas will especially benefit, for the waitlist for these countries is years long.[[3]](#footnote-2)
6. **EFFECT ON HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY IN [STATE]**

The U.S. Citizenship Act will have a marked impact on thousands of students, faculty, and employees in the higher education community, not to mention the state and national economies. There are over 1 million international students in the United States year to year, including [number] in [state], adding $38.7 billion to the national economy and supporting 415,996 jobs in the 2019-2020 academic year.[[4]](#footnote-3) That same year, international students added $[number] and supported [number] jobs in [state] alone.[[5]](#footnote-4) Nationally, there are approximately 427,000 undocumented students enrolled in higher education institutions, including 181,000 DACA-eligible individuals.[[6]](#footnote-5) [State] itself is home to [number] DACA recipients, with an additional [number] eligible to apply.[[7]](#footnote-6) In [state], there are approximately [number] undocumented immigrants enrolled in institutions of higher education, and an estimated 98,000 more graduate from high school every year, including [number] in [state].[[8]](#footnote-7) These students areworking diligently to advance themselves, notwithstanding their uncertainty regarding whether they will be able to complete their education, much less find work in their desired field and make a life in the United States.

[Specific examples/cases from your school or state that demonstrate why your institution supports this legislation, changing identifying information where appropriate to protect undocumented participants. Include information like the affected party (students, employees, alumni, etc.), their connection to your state/institution, what they stand to lose, and what you stand to lose without them.] The U.S. Citizenship Act gives our students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to reach their fullest potential in the United States

We appreciate your many efforts thus far to support higher education on behalf of our state and its immigrant and international students. We sincerely hope you will continue to support those who contribute so much to our campuses, communities, and economy. We would welcome the opportunity to tell you more about why we support this and other needed reforms, including the Dream Act of 2021, to modernize our immigration system so that our immigrant and international community members can live freely and fully contribute to our communities and economy in [state]. We are eager to work with you on these important issues. For any questions or to follow up from this letter, please contact [name] of [institution] at [email] or [phone].

Sincerely,

[institutional signatories]

1. For questions regarding this template or general strategy, please contact [info@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:info@presidentsalliance.org). For policy or strategy questions on domestic students (e.g., Dream, TPS, and other immigrants), contact [jose@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:jose@presidentsalliance.org). For policy or strategy questions on international students and scholars, contact [jill@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:jill@presidentsalliance.org) or [miriam@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:miriam@presidentsalliance.org). For contact information for congressional offices and staff, contact [jose@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:jose@presidentsalliance.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. *States*, Higher Ed Immigr. Portal, <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/states/> (last visited Mar. 18, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. *See* Rajika Bhandari, *Did You Know: Five Realities About International Students in the U.S., Higher Ed Immigr. Portal*, <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/policy/did-you-know-5-realities-international-students/> (last visited Mar. 18, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. [Refer to this source to include state-specific information (make sure to scroll down).] *National Data*, Higher Ed Immigr. Portal, <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/national/national-data/> (last visited Mar. 18, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. [Refer to the [source above](https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2#trends_reports) to include state-specific information.] *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Presidents’ All. on Higher Educ. & Immigr. & New Am. Econ., Undocumented Students in Higher Education: How Many Students are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They? (2021), *available at* <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/research/undocumented-students-in-higher-education-updated-march-2021/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. [Refer to [this source](https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/research/undocumented-students-in-higher-education-updated-march-2021/) to include state-specific information, if available for your state.] *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. [Refer to [this source](https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/research/undocumented-students-in-higher-education-updated-march-2021/) to include state-specific information for DACA recipients, if available for your state.] *Id.*; [Refer to [this source](https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/research/migration-policy-institute-fact-sheet-on-number-of-dreamers-graduating-from-high-school/) to include state-specific information for undocumented students, if available for your state]. Jie Zong & Jeanne Batalova, Migr. Pol’y Inst., How Many Unauthorized Immigrants Graduate from U.S. High Schools Annually? (2019), *available at* <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/research/migration-policy-institute-fact-sheet-on-number-of-dreamers-graduating-from-high-school/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)