

September 15, 2022

The Honorable Rena Bitter
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador Bitter,

On behalf of our organizations working in diverse sectors, including higher education, immigration, and international education, we write to thank the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs for the efforts made to date to ensure efficient visa processing as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to urge you to make these policies and processes permanent where possible. Continuing these helpful improvements will enable us to rebound from the severe impact the pandemic has had on study and travel in the United States.

We would especially like to commend the extraordinary leadership of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visas Julie Stufft and the dedicated foreign service officers in the field for their tireless work. Thanks to the changes the Bureau has made to date, many international students, scholars, and others have been able to secure visas to travel to the United States, bolstering our national interests. When these individuals from around the globe are able to come to the United States to study, teach, or conduct research, we know that our economy, security, and relations with the world are strengthened.

We have all experienced the [enormous benefits](#) brought by international students and scholars to U.S. campuses and communities for generations. They make significant contributions to U.S. foreign policy, diplomacy, and homeland security goals, while also enriching the worldview of their domestic classmates. Their presence in the United States helps to create jobs, contributing almost \$25 billion to local communities during the 2020-2021 school year. As noted by the National Foundation for American Policy, for more than two decades, more than half of all U.S. unicorns—start-ups valued at \$1 billion or more—have been founded or co-founded by immigrants. Notably, the co-founder of Moderna, Noubar Afeyan, began his career as an international student in the United States, as did Nasir Ahmed, who helped invent the image compression technology used for image sharing and online video-conferencing which has been so important to our ability to remain connected during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, our competitor countries, namely the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, are [forging ahead](#) with welcoming policies to recruit and retain the world's global talent. The U.K., for example, reached its goal of hosting 600,000 international students by the year 2030 a full decade early by creating more post-study work opportunities and ensuring immigration policies are welcoming to global research talent. Similarly, Canada surpassed its milestone of attracting 450,000 international students three years early by adopting expedited visa processing for

certain qualifying students, offering post-study work visas that can last up to three years, and making it easier for international students to immigrate.

And while the other countries named above are experiencing double-digit growth in international student enrollment, by contrast, the total number of new international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities is on a downward trend.

To help us better attract the vital talent from around the world seeking to study or conduct research in the United States, we urge you to find ways to make permanent the following changes recommended in [a letter led by Senator Alex Padilla \(D-Calif.\)](#) last year on behalf of a group of lawmakers.

In particular, we urge you to permanently maximize alternatives to in-person visa interviews by providing waivers, virtual interviews, extension of visa eligibility waivers, and all other practicable options. We appreciate the policy guidance to avoid duplicative in-person interview screening of visa applicants who have already been vetted and received a visa to travel to the United States in the past. This wise use of limited resources both protects our security and reduces backlogs. We expect that there are now sufficient data to demonstrate the effectiveness of this policy, and we urge you to make permanent the visa interview waiver process in regulation in order to reduce future uncertainty or confusion.

We would be happy to meet with you and appropriate members of your staff to discuss further. If we can provide more information or be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us. Jill Welch can be reached at jill@presidentsalliance.org to schedule a meeting for our organizations to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

American Immigration Council
American Immigration Lawyers Association
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Council of Graduate Schools
ETS
Federation of American Scientists
Foreign Policy for America
Immigration Hub
Institute for Progress
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Immigration Forum
Niskanen Center
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
World Education Services (WES)