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September 15, 2020

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Armed Services Committee
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
Armed Services Committee
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
United States Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the undersigned higher education associations, we write today in support of Sec. 1763 of the House-passed fiscal year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). We urge the Senate and House Armed Services conferees to include this provision in the final FY 2021 NDAA conference agreement, and we ask that the Senate and House Committees on the Judiciary support its inclusion.

Sec. 1763 would allow international students to engage in online or distance education classes or programs that are determined necessary by an institution or program for the protection of health and safety until the end of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Such classes or programs would count toward the requirement to pursue a full course of study to maintain a non-immigrant visa. Sec. 1763 provides much needed clarity and fairness and assures international students that they can continue to study in the United States if the pandemic forces their program to pivot to an online-only mode.

At the start of the pandemic, many of our international students decided to remain in the United States even as campuses closed and programs shifted online. Being in the United States and close to their campuses allows international students to study in the same time zone and provides a safe learning environment during this unprecedented public health emergency. Some one million international students attend U.S. colleges and universities annually, contributing greatly to this country's intellectual and cultural vibrancy. They also yield an estimated economic impact of \$41 billion and support more than 450,000 U.S. jobs. In addition, international students, especially graduate students, are essential to supporting teaching and research, which in turn support economic growth, public health efforts, and national security across our country.

We are grateful that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement withdrew the July 6 guidance regarding international students and granted flexibility for students already in the United States and for new students enrolled in programs operating with a hybrid status. But as colleges and universities continue to struggle with the ever-changing problems posed by the pandemic, they are undertaking multi-faceted, nuanced models for education this fall and likely into the spring. Sec. 1763 ensures that international students with valid visas can travel to the United States for their education regardless of whether their programs are conducted online, in person, or through a combination of both. It would also guarantee that international students can continue to study at their U.S. institutions in the spring semester if the global pandemic continues into 2021.

We urge you to include Sec. 1763 in the final FY 2021 NDAA and provide assurances to our international students that they can remain in or travel to the United States to attend a U.S. institution of higher education regardless of their program's learning modality. Thank you for your continuing support for our international students and our higher education institutions as we begin the challenging 2020-2021 academic year.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell, President

On behalf of:

American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
NAFSA: Association of International Educators