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Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies USA

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To

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave.,
SE, Washington, DC 20593

To Director U. R. Jaddou,
The Director U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services,
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW Washington,
DC 20529-2140

Dear Hon. Secretary Mayorkas and Director Ms. Jaddou,

Attn: Omar S. Hughes, Office of the Executive Secretariat, USCIS

Subject: Request to Enhance OPT Rules for Retaining U.S. Trained STEM Graduates

I hope this letter finds you well. On behalf of Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies, I am writing to express a request from foreign students educating in the US universities to make key rules changes in the Optional Practical Training (OPT). We observe a huge gap between graduating students and available H1B missing them an opportunity to contribute to the US industry while fulfilling their American dream. Our analysis concludes that OPT changes are essential not only for retaining highly skilled STEM graduates within the United States but also for ensuring our nation's continued leadership in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

We request following changes in OPT rules:

1. **Extension of STEM OPT Period:** Extending the STEM OPT period from 24 months to 48 months for eligible students with degrees in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) fields.
2. **OPT application period:** Extend the time period for applying OPT post-graduation from 60 days to 180 days.

- 3. Enhancement of H-1B Visa Lottery Chances for STEM Graduates:** Providing STEM degree holders with six times the chances of being selected in the H-1B visa lottery compared to non-STEM degree holders.

Given the evolving landscape of global technology and the increasing challenges posed in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, retaining highly skilled STEM talent within our borders is not just an economic imperative but a matter of national security. The National Security Agency (NSA) has highlighted a talent deficit in emerging technologies as a national security threat. Retaining U.S. trained STEM professionals is critical to establishing a competitive advantage in these areas. By extending the OPT period, providing extra H-1B visa allocations, and increasing lottery chances, we can retain the talent that is vital for maintaining our technological edge and national security.

Furthermore, this initiative has a significant economic impact. Foreign students contribute immensely to the U.S. economy, bringing nearly \$10 billion to our universities in terms of fees and expenses. They also enrich our academic environment and foster cross-cultural understanding. Without the proposed rule changes, the dream of continuing their education and careers in the United States becomes increasingly difficult for these talented individuals. This uncertainty might lead them to explore educational opportunities in other countries such as Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and others, which would adversely impact U.S. universities and our economy in the long run.

Therefore, we urge the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to swiftly implement these changes. By doing so, we not only retain the talent that fuels our innovation but also sustain the economic benefits that these students bring to our nation.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and the critical role USCIS plays in shaping our nation's technological future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Khanderao Kand,
Chief of Policy and Strategy,
Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS)
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Email: khanderao@fiids-usa.org



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

November 17, 2023

Khanderao Kand
Chief of Policy and Strategy
Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS)
khanderao@fiids-usa.org

Dear Mr. Kand:

Thank you for your October 23, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I am responding on behalf of the Department.

DHS recognizes the significance and benefit of Optional Practical Training (OPT) for nonimmigrant students who seek additional training or to supplement the knowledge and skills gained in their coursework. DHS continues to examine the overall structure of OPT and the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) OPT extension and will address any needs appropriately. For example, DHS has published several updates to the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List in recent years, including one released on July 12, 2023.

Concerning your request to enhance H-1B lottery chances for STEM graduates, DHS published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM), "Modernizing H-1B Requirements, Providing Flexibility in the F-1 Program, and Program Improvements Affecting Other Nonimmigrant Workers," on October 23, 2023, that proposes a number of changes to improve the efficiency of the H-1B program, add benefits and flexibilities and improve integrity measures. Specifically, the NPRM proposes to alter the way prospective beneficiaries are entered into the H-1B lottery, which DHS anticipates will create a fairer selection process. Members of the public may submit comments in response to this NPRM through December 22, 2023.

Thank you for your interest in this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director