

July 29, 2013

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515-6501

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515-6537

Dear Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As leaders of the higher education community, we urge you and your colleagues in the House of Representatives to pass meaningful, comprehensive immigration reform legislation upon your return from the August recess. The higher education community has long supported bipartisan efforts to address the serious problems of our current immigration system. We appreciate the hard work that lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have expended over the last several months to draft legislation to modernize the nation's immigration system in order to better serve the needs of our country.

We strongly encourage the House of Representatives to pass bipartisan immigration reform legislation that can be conferenced with the Senate, and ultimately signed into law by the President. We believe such legislation should address many critical issues, including:

DREAM Act

It is essential to address the situation facing the 65,000 undocumented students who graduate each year from the nation's high schools. While these students were born in foreign countries, they were brought here as children, raised in the U.S., and consider themselves Americans. In response to their untenable situation, the higher education community has supported the DREAM Act since it was first introduced in 2001. It is critical that a reformed immigration system provide these undocumented students an expedited path to citizenship for accomplishing academic pursuits and/or serving in our military. To help ensure their success, legislation should permit states to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students and provide these students with access to federal student loans and the work-study program. In this way, a reformed system would fairly reward their hard work and serve our long-term economic growth by providing these young people a way out of the shadows and into our workforce.

Modernization of the Green Card Process for Advanced Degree Graduates

America's higher education system is the envy of the world. It includes a diverse set of institutions, from community colleges to four-year liberal arts colleges to large public and private research universities. Because of the diversity and excellence of our higher education system, we attract top international students from around the world. But we are unable to put their talents to use in the U.S. following graduation because our immigration policy provides inadequate opportunities for advanced degree graduates of American universities to remain in the U.S. and contribute to our economy.

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As a result, it is crucial that a modernized immigration system permit talented international students to remain in the U.S. following the completion of their studies, especially those graduating with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees. The green card system should be streamlined for STEM graduates, as well as those with a doctorate degree in any academic discipline. In effect, these graduates would have a green card stapled to their diploma. It should also include an exemption for international advanced STEM degree graduates from the employment-based green card limit, as well as take steps to address the backlog in the current green card system. In an era when policymakers at all levels of government and business leaders alike are crying out for more graduates with advanced degrees, taking steps to retain the students educated at U.S. universities is simply common-sense.

Modernization of Non-Immigrant Visas

In addition, an updated immigration system should include reforms to non-immigrant visas, particularly the H-1B visa, in order to enhance our recruitment and retention of high-skilled international students and employees. Among other reforms, H-1B employees should be able to revalidate their visas here rather than requiring them to leave the country to re-apply for the same visa. This is a common-sense step that would simplify the immigration process for these employees, many of whom are critical to the education and research missions of our institutions. Also, immigration reform legislation should address the so-called “dual intent” issue for student visas by eliminating the need for international students to prove their intention to leave the country upon completion of their studies.

While we recognize that there are many possible paths toward a reformed immigration system, the need to modernize our immigration system is simply too important and vital to our nation to let this opportunity pass. We urge you to promptly pass bipartisan immigration reform legislation that can be conferenced with the Senate, and ultimately signed into law by the President.

As always, the higher education community stands ready to work with you to help advance the ultimate goal of enacting sensible, bipartisan and comprehensive immigration reform that will better serve our nation.

Sincerely,

Michael Reilly
Executive Director
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

Walter R. Bumphus
President and CEO
American Association of Community Colleges

Muriel A. Howard
President
American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Molly Corbett Broad
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cc:

The Honorable Eric Cantor, Majority Leader
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Majority Whip
The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer, Minority Whip
The Honorable James Clyburn, Assistant Democratic Leader