June 4, 2020

Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Alliance of 450+ University and College Presidents and Chancellors Supports Continued Existence of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Dear President Trump:

On behalf of the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration (Presidents’ Alliance), we write to express our unqualified support for Optional Practical Training (OPT), and STEM OPT and respectfully urge you not to issue an Executive Order or Presidential Proclamation to, or otherwise direct the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or its component agencies to issue regulations or policy guidance that would suspend, end, or reduce the availability of these programs. Indefinitely or temporarily suspending OPT would substantially undermine our nation’s economic recovery while dismantling our nation’s ability to competitively attract and retain top international student and scholar talent.

The non-partisan Presidents’ Alliance comprises over 450 college and university presidents and chancellors of public and private institutions. We represent all sectors of higher education. Together, our members’ institutions enroll over five million students across 41 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The Presidents’ Alliance is committed to supporting policies that create a welcoming environment for international and immigrant students that permits them to make the most of their talents and thereby contributes to U.S. social and economic global progress. We closely monitor any proposed changes in our nation’s immigration policies and practices that would negatively impact our students and campuses and the communities and states we serve.1 For a full list of our member Presidents and Chancellors, please see Appendix A.

The OPT program allows international students to continue and deepen their education by applying the skills and knowledge they learn in the classroom to a professional setting. Through OPT and STEM OPT, international students obtain employment authorization for one to three years after graduation, gain practical, hands-on training in a field directly relevant to their studies, and make significant contributions to American innovation and industry. The U.S. government has permitted international students to pursue “employment for practical training” in some form for over 70 years. In 2018-19, there were 223,085 OPT participants.2

Importantly, OPT does not threaten American jobs and actually serves as a boon to U.S. employers. According to the Niskanen Center, experiential learning

1 For more information about the Presidents’ Alliance, visit http://www.presidentsalliance.org.
opportunities like OPT lead to increased innovation and higher average earnings, without costing U.S. workers their jobs or decreasing U.S. worker wages. A National Foundation for American Policy study focused on STEM employment found no evidence that OPT participation reduces job opportunities for U.S. workers. Critically, the report also demonstrated that unemployment rates are actually lower in fields with large numbers of OPT participants. Moreover, international students and their families contributed nearly $41 billion and more than 458,000 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2018-2019 academic year, making international education the fifth largest U.S. services export. A report by the Business Roundtable found that scaling back OPT would result in an increase in unemployment, leading to a total loss of 443,000 jobs, including 255,000 fewer jobs for native-born U.S. workers by 2028. OPT students, particularly those enrolled in STEM OPT, also participate on the front lines in COVID-19-related fields, including medicine, healthcare, and vaccine research. That such individuals are an integral part of our pandemic response capabilities makes this the wrong time to suspend or reduce the availability of OPT.

The consequences of ending OPT for students, U.S. higher education, and the economy will be severe. If the United States wants to remain competitive and attractive for the world’s brightest minds and many of its future entrepreneurs, doctors, and scientists, we must preserve OPT as a critical part of encouraging international students to invest their education with us. International students increasingly view this type of educational work-based experience as critical to their degree program, and practical training is an important factor in deciding where to pursue study outside their home country. Surveys from the past four years indicate that 73 percent of international students and alumni consider the ability to gain U.S. work experience “very important” when deciding to study in the United States, and 62 percent of prospective students consider the ability to work in the country after graduation as very important. Many foreign STEM students pursue OPT opportunities in medical and scientific research, sustaining the U.S. as a global leader in these areas. Moreover, competing countries such as Canada, Australia, and China all offer experiential learning and post-graduation employment programs.

We thank you for your great support for America’s colleges and universities. We respectfully request that you safeguard the future of international education in America and its contributions to critical research and the U.S. economy by making clear that international students and scholars are welcomed here, their talent and contributions are valued, and that OPT and STEM OPT will be protected.

Our Alliance stands ready to assist or provide additional information for consideration of these matters. If you would like to follow up, please contact Miriam Feldblum at miriam@presidentsalliance.org.

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5 Id.
Sincerely,

Miriam Feldblum
Executive Director
Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration

Louis Caldera
Co-chair, Steering Committee
Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
Former President, The University of New Mexico

Cc:
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APPENDIX A - List of Presidents’ Alliance Members

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Barbara K. Altmann, President, Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA
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Michael Amiridis, Chancellor, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
Teresa Amott, President, Knox College, Galesburg, IL
Michelle J. Anderson, President, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY
David Angel, President, Clark University, Worcester, MA
Jeffrey Armstrong, President, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA
Virginia Arthur, President, Metropolitan State University, Saint Paul, MN
Ken Atwater, President, Hillsborough Community College, Tampa, FL
Lawrence S. Bacow, President, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Steven Bahl, President, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL
Rick Bailey, President, Northern New Mexico College, El Rito, NM
Robert Barchi, President, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ
Bruce Baron, Chancellor, San Bernardino Community College District, San Bernardino, CA
Denise Battles, President, SUNY Geneseo, Geneseo, NY
Michael Beals, President, Vanguard University, Costa Mesa, CA
Irma Becerra, President, Marymount University, Arlington, VA
Erika Beck, President, CSU Channel Islands, Camarillo, CA
Sian Beilock, President, Barnard College, New York City, NY
Allan Belton, President, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA
Hubert Benitez, President & CEO, Saint Luke's College of Health Sciences, Kansas City, MO
Joanne Berger-Sweeney, President, Trinity College, Hartford, CT
Katherine Bergeron, President, Connecticut College, New London, CT
Joe Bertolino, President, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT
Carrie Besnette Hauser, President, Colorado Mountain College, Glenwood Springs, CO
Mickey Best, President, New Mexico State University - Grants Campus, Grants, NM
David Beyer, President, Everett Community College, Everett, WA
Scott Bierman, President, Beloit College, Beloit, WI
Audrey Bilger, President, Reed College, Portland, OR
James Birge, President, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams, MA
Erik Bitterbaum, President, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY
Anne Blackhurst, President, Minnesota State University, Moorhead, Moorhead, MN
Gene Block, Chancellor, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA
Lee C. Bollinger, President, Columbia University in the City of New York, New York, NY
Sarah Bolton, President, The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH
Connie Ledoux Book, President, Elon University, Elon, NC
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Brian Bruess, President, St. Norbert College, DePere, WI
Yocasta Brugal, President, San Juan Bautista School of Medicine, Caguas, PR
Bernard Bull, President, Goddard College, Plainfield, VT
Mark Burstein, President, Lawrence University, Appleton, WI
Sylvia Burwell, President, American University, Washington, D.C.
Alison Byerly, President, Lafayette College, Easton, PA
Carlos Campos, President, Ashland University, Ashland, OH
Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University-Newark, Newark, NJ
Christopher Capuano, President, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, NJ
Robert Caret, Chancellor, University System of Maryland, Baltimore, MD
Seamus Carey, President, Transylvania University, Lexington, KY
David Carlisle, President & CEO, Charles R.D. Drew University of Medicine and Science, Los Angeles, CA
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Janine Davidson, President, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Denver, CO
Roger Davis, President, Community College of Beaver County, Monaca, PA
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Miles Davis, President, Linfield College, McMinnville, OR
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Adela de la Torre, President, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA
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Terrence Leas, President, Big Bend Community College, Moses Lake, WA
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Daniel Lemons, President, Lehman College of the City University of New York, Bronx, NY
David Levinson, President, Norwalk Community College, Norwalk, CT
Willard Lewallen, President, Hartnell College, Salinas, CA
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David Livingston, President, Lewis University, Romeoville, IL
Michael Lovell, President, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
Elaine Maimon, President, Governors State University, University Park, IL
Ali R. Malekzadeh, President, Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL
Maud Mandel, President, Williams College, Williamstown, MA
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Dan Martin, President, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA
Biddy Martin, President, Amherst College, Amherst, MA
George Martin, President, St. Edward’s University, Austin, TX
Michael Martin, President, Florida Gulf Coast University, Ft. Myers, FL
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Patricia McGuire, President, Trinity Washington University, Washington, D.C.
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Joshua Merchant, President, Buena Vista University, Storm Lake, IA
Scott Miller, President, Virginia Wesleyan University, Virginia Beach, VA
Judy Miner, Chancellor, Foothill-De Anza Community College District, Los Altos Hills, CA
Sam Minner, President, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM
Judy Mitchell, President, Joliet Junior College, Joliet, IL
Mark Mitsui, President, Portland Community College, Portland, OR
Michael Mittelman, President, Salus University, Elkins Park, PA
Agnes Mojica, Chancellor, San German Campus of Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, San German, PR
Christopher Molloy, Chancellor, Rutgers University–New Brunswick, New Brunswick, NJ
Jacqueline Moloney, Chancellor, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, MA
Anthony Monaco, President, Tufts University, Medford, MA
Bob Mong, President, University of North Texas at Dallas, Dallas, TX
Carol Moore, President, Columbia College, Columbia, SC
Tomás Morales, President, California State University, San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA
Stephen Morgan, President, University of the West, Rosemead, CA
Leroy Morishita, President, California State University, East Bay, Hayward, CA
Brad Mortensen, President, Weber State University, Ogden, UT
Lynn Morton, President, Warren Wilson College, Asheville, NC
Timothy Mottet, President, Colorado State University Pueblo, Pueblo, CO
Shirley Mullen, President, Houghton College, Houghton, NY
Anthony Munroe, President, Essex County College, Newark, NJ
David Munson, President, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY
Kathleen Murray, President, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA
Janet Napolitano, President, University of California System, Oakland, CA
Michelle Nealon, President, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles, CA
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Wilfredo Nieves, President, Capital Community College, Hartford, CT
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Joseph Nyre, President, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ
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Maureen O’Connor, President, Palo Alto University, Palo Alto, CA
Brennan O’Donnell, President, Manhattan College, Bronx, NY
Eduardo Ochoa, President, California State University, Monterey Bay, Seaside, CA
Melvin Oliver, President, Pitzer College, Claremont, CA
Scott Olson, President, Winona State University, Winona, MN
Linda Oubré, President, Whittier College, Whittier, CA
David Oxtoby, President Emeritus, Pomona College, Claremont, CA
Eduardo J. Padron, President Emeritus, Miami Dade College, Miami, FL
Troy Paino, President, University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg, VA
Mary Papazian, President, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA
Thomas Parham, President, CSU Dominguez Hills, Carson, CA
Ava Parker, President, Palm Beach State College, Lake Worth, FL
Annette Parker, President, South Central College, North Mankato, MN
Bart Patterson, President, Nevada State College, Henderson, NV
Laurie Patton, President, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT
Christina Paxson, President, Brown University, Providence, RI
Mary Pearl, University Dean, Macaulay Honors College of CUNY, New York City, NY
Luis Pedraja, President, Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester, MA
M. Lee Pelton, President, Emerson College, Boston, MA
Monte Perez, President, Los Angeles Mission College, Los Angeles, CA
Daniel Phelan, President, Jackson College, Jackson, MI
Sharon Pierce, President, Minneapolis Community & Technical College, Minneapolis, MN
David Podell, President, Massachusetts Bay Community College, Wellesley, MA
Martha E. Pollack, President, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Deana Porterfield, President, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, NY
Steven Poskanzer, President, Carleton College, Northfield, MN
David Potash, President, Wilbur Wright College, Chicago, IL
Paul Pribbenow, President, Augsburg University, Minneapolis, MN
Vincent Price, President, Duke University, Durham, NC
Annette Prisco, President, Felician University, Rutherford, NJ
Avis Proctor, President, William Rainey Harper College, Palatine, IL
Carol Everhart Quillen, President, Davidson College, Davidson, NC
Carlos Quiñones-Alfonso, Presidente, Dewey University, San Juan, PR
Ravi Rajan, President, CalArts, Valencia, CA
Scott Ralls, President, Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale, VA
Sabah Randhawa, President, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA
Edward Ray, President, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR
Wendy Raymond, President, Haverford College, Haverford, PA
Mark Reed, President, Saint Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, PA
Shirley Reed, President, South Texas College, McAllen, TX
L. Rafael Reif, President, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
Thom Reilly, Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education, Las Vegas, NV
Shai Reshef, President, University of the People, Pasadena, CA
Jim Richardson, President, Wenatchee Valley College, Wenatchee, WA
Angie Richey, President, Life Pacific College, San Dimas, CA
Christine Riordan, President, Adelphi University, Garden City, NY
Valerie Roberson, President, Roxbury Community College, Boston, MA
Cheryl Roberts, President, Shoreline Community College, Shoreline, WA
Isabel Roche, Interim President, Bennington College, Bennington, VT
Lyle Roelofs, President, Berea College, Berea, KY
Becky Roloff, President, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN
Clayton Rose, President, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME
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Brian Rosenberg, President, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN
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Christina Royal, President, Holyoke Community College, Holyoke, MA
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William Rudd, President, Marietta College, Marietta, OH
Mim Runey, Chancellor, Johnson & Wales University, Providence, RI
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Yves Salomon-Fernandez, President, Greenfield Community College, Greenfield, MA
Peter Salovey, President, Yale University, New Haven, CT
Frank Sanchez, President, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI
Isa Sarac, President, Virginia International University, Fairfax, VA
Jackson Sasser, President, Santa Fe College, Gainesville, FL
Lawrence Schall, President, Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, GA
Kim Schatzel, President, Towson University, Towson, MD
Michael H. Schill, President, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Mark Schlissel, President, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
Linda Schott, President, Southern Oregon University, Ashland, OR
Stephen Schutt, President, Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, IL
William Scroggins, President, Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut, CA
Douglas Searcy, President, Barton College, Wilson, NC
Joel Seligman, President, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY
William Serrata, President, El Paso Community College, El Paso, TX
Jack Shannon, President, Christian Brothers University, Memphis, TN
Muddassir Siddiqi, CEO/President, Central College-Houston Community College System, Houston, TX
Jay Simmons, President, Simpson College, Indianola, IA
Amit Singh, President, Edmonds Community College, Lynnwood, WA
Ronald Slepitza, President, Avila University, Kansas City, MO
James Smith, President, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI
Kent Smith, President, Langston University, Langston, OK
Valerie Smith, President, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA
Timothy Law Snyder, President, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA
Rosanne Somerson, President, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
Michael Sorrell, President, Paul Quinn College, Dallas, TX
Clayton Spencer, President, Bates College, Lewiston, ME
Eric Spina, President, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH
Samuel Stanley, President, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY
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Diane Steele, President, University of Saint Mary, Leavenworth, KS
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Claire Sterk, President, Emory University, Atlanta, GA
Maryanne Stevens, President, College of Saint Mary, Omaha, NE
Carlos Strikwerda, President, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA
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Daniele Struppa, President, Chapman University, Orange, CA
Paul Stumb, President, Cumberland University, Lebanon, TN
Kumble Subbaswamy, Chancellor, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA
Roger Sublett, President, Union Institute & University, Cincinnati, OH
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William Tsutsui, President, Hendrix College, Conway, AR
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Robert Vela, President, San Antonio College, San Antonio, TX
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Jerry Weber, President, Bellevue College, Bellevue, WA
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Steven Weiner, President, Menlo College, Atherton, CA
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David Wippman, President, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY
Leslie Wong, President, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA
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Scott Wyatt, President, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, UT
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