



March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer,

I write today on behalf of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the world's largest professional association dedicated to international education and exchange, to request support for international education programs and activities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as part of any federal stimulus or relief for U.S. higher education or the broader travel industry considered by the Senate. We fear that the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be a profound shock to the international education and exchange landscape.

Yesterday, for the first time, the U.S. Department of State issued a Level 4 Global Travel Advisory, the most severe warning the Department can issue, advising all U.S. citizens to avoid international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. As important as this guidance is for ensuring the health and safety of U.S. citizens, this, along with other COVID-19-related travel restrictions, has had a significant impact on international education and exchange programs. U.S. colleges and universities along with exchange visitor programs, English as a Second Language programs, and study abroad program providers are taking the necessary steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the health and safety of their communities. Typical steps include temporary closures, telework and distance education policies, as well as providing housing for international students and scholars unable to return home and bringing U.S. students back from studying abroad. All of these steps have and will come at an economic cost.

For example, many U.S. campuses have offices for study abroad and for international student and scholar services that are either fully or partially funded by fees paid by students and scholars to participate in programs or receive certain services. For study abroad, we are aware of some large, public U.S. higher education institutions with over 15 staff members in their office where only one position is funded by the university's general fund. As study abroad offices issue refunds for spring programs that were cut short and cancel summer and potentially fall programs, the revenue that supports these offices will disappear. And this is on



top of the additional expenses these offices have paid to bring U.S. students home from around the world on short notice. Study abroad offices are currently focused on the immediate task at hand—ensuring that all of their students are safe, healthy, and cared for—but there is already a fear that positions will be eliminated, people will be let go, and programs will be ended, not just postponed.

The same can be said for international student and scholar support on U.S. campuses. Many campuses are working overtime to ensure their international students and scholars are safe, healthy, and supported in this difficult time. With almost every U.S. campus closing down and transitioning to online learning, while many international students were able to depart for home to take courses from there, some were not able to and needed to remain on campus. Many international student offices are providing emergency funds to these students to help cover unexpected costs of rent and food, for example, or to help defray tuition and living expenses as parents overseas find themselves out of a job or unable to work due to the pandemic, or the student is now unable to continue to work on campus. And similar support is being offered to international scholars who find themselves unable to depart due to travel restrictions. Further, colleges and universities that had to end the employment of international faculty or others in H-1B status early as a result of the response to COVID-19 are required by law to pay the travel costs for the employee to return home. International students and their families contributed nearly \$41 billion to the U.S. economy in the 2018-19 academic year. Looking ahead, we don't yet know what the impact on future enrollment numbers will be; already new international student enrollment has declined nearly 11% since fall 2016.

We are a part of a larger international education ecosystem that includes not only U.S. higher education, but also private sector education abroad program providers, English as a Second Language programs, travel agents, shipping and logistics companies, and many more. This ecosystem enables and supports the over 380,000 U.S. college students who go abroad to study, conduct research, intern, and participate in international service-learning programs. It also supports the more than one million international students and 136,000 international scholars who are studying or conducting research on U.S. campuses. We have also heard from our private sector partners that some have already had to furlough or layoff staff and many are concerned that they will not be able to recover from the economic consequences of this pandemic.

International education and exchange is essential to U.S. leadership, global competitiveness, research and innovation, intercultural understanding, and public diplomacy. As you consider providing financial assistance to critical sectors negatively impacted by this crisis like higher



education and the travel industry, we urge you to ensure that support for international education and exchange is included in any such relief.

Thank you for your hard work and leadership through this global crisis. Even as the country takes the necessary steps to respond to this crisis, we must remember that international cooperation is part of the solution. As with previous international health emergencies, NAFSA has no doubt that international engagement will lead the way forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Esther D. Brimmer".

Esther D. Brimmer, DPhil
Executive Director & CEO
NAFSA: Association of International Educators