United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 11, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to express our concerns regarding the ongoing unavailability of visa appointments during the peak visa application season for students and scholars seeking to enter the U.S. in time for the start of classes and the academic year. We urge the State Department to ensure timely processing of F, M, and J student and exchange visitor nonimmigrant visas, consistent with the approach taken by administrations of both parties in the past, and to implement other measures to avoid diminishing U.S. competitiveness. Specifically, we are hearing from constituents and stakeholders that no timely visa appointments are available for students at some embassies and consulates. This only exacerbates uncertainty about whether students' visas will be processed in time for them to travel to the United States to begin their studies.

These challenges come at a time when major academic institutions need skilled, international talent to begin their semesters. Without a fix, the repercussions will be felt across the academic and skilled-technical talent pipeline.

International students are critical to the success of our universities, including contributing nearly $43 billion annually to local communities and supporting more than 355,000 American jobs during the 2024-2025 academic year. Even though international students make up only six percent of the total higher education population, their enrollment creates opportunities for American students. For every additional international undergraduate enrolled at a U.S. public university, two additional in-state freshman students can enroll.[1] Most international students pay out-of-state tuition, injecting vital revenue into our colleges and universities and helping keep costs down for domestic students. International students also improve our national security by fostering global relationships, cross cultural understanding, and long-lasting diplomatic ties. These benefits are at risk if visa processing delays persist.

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[1] Chen, M. (2021). The impact of international students on U.S. colleges: Higher education as a service export (EdWorkingPaper No. 21-405). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. https://doi.org/10.26300/x1wy-4d72

The case-by-case nature of availability for access to expedited appointments or National Interest Exception requests is neither efficient nor sustainable. Instead of diverting already limited personnel resources, the State Department should ensure that its consular sections restore priority to interview, adjudicate, and process student visas in time for the upcoming school year.

In addition to the above, we urge the State Department to extend interview waivers for vetted returning student applicants; ensure adequate staffing for timely visa vetting and processing; and meaningfully engage with stakeholders to promote greater transparency.

International students bolster the American workforce, drive innovation, and better position our country to maintain its competitive edge. Therefore, we request a written response answering these questions within 30 days:

1. What resources has the Department devoted to processing the backlogs and streamlining processing of F, J, and M visas?

2. Have consular process priorities changed since the spring and summer of 2025? What visa interview categories are currently prioritized by the Bureau of Consular Affairs and where do student visas fall within that list? Provide the list of visa interview prioritization.

3. What guidance has been sent to embassies and consulates regarding prioritization or deprioritization of student and exchange visitor visa processing? Provide a copy of all guidance regarding the prioritizing or deprioritizing of student and exchange visitor visas since August 2025 until the present day.

4. How are interview slots being allocated at embassies and consulates and where do student and exchange visitor visa appointments fit within that allocation?

5. How often are consular post websites and the main State Department website updated for relevant and current information regarding current U.S. consulate operations including visa appointment availability and approximate processing times?

6. When will you resume publicly posting monthly, accurate visa issuance data by category?

7. Will the Department commit to implementing regular, ongoing outreach and collaboration with stakeholders and relevant agencies about the student and

exchange visitor visa process and ensure the timely processing of F, J, and M visas?

8. How do you ensure that embassies and consulates are accurately and timely informed of any regulatory or policy changes regarding student and exchange visitor visas?

9. What are the average processing times for F, M, and J visas at the top five locations processing these visas from September 2025 to date, disaggregated by month?

10. Last year, the Department of State announced new vetting, including online presence vetting, of all student and exchange visitor applicants in the F, M, and J nonimmigrant classification.

    a. What resources has the Department of State devoted to these new vetting procedures?

    b. In developing these new vetting procedures, what steps has your Department taken to ensure our national security interests of welcoming bona fide international students in our communities can still be achieved through timely processing of F, J, and M visas.

    c. How many applications have been refused pursuant to the new enhanced vetting procedures? Please disaggregate these numbers by the basis for refusal.

Sincerely,

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

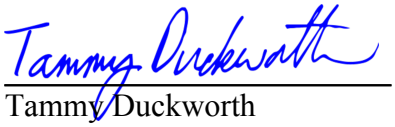
Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

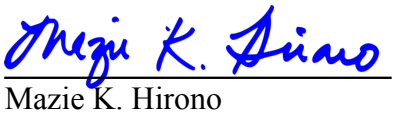
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



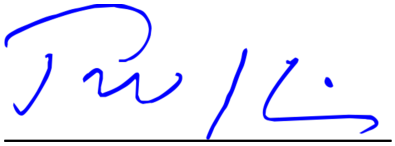
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

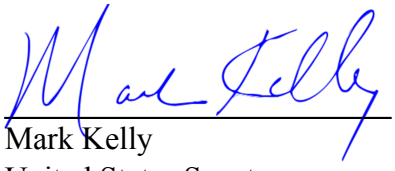
Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



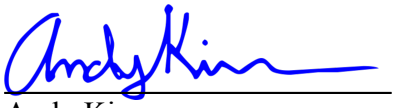
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

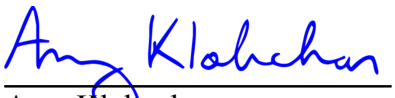


Mark Kelly
United States Senator

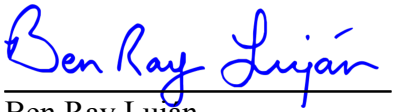


Andy Kim
United States Senator

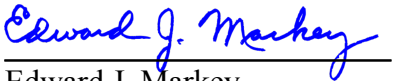
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Peter Welch
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
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Ron Wyden
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