

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 19, 2025

To: The Honorable Secretary Marco Rubio
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Secretary Kristi Noem
United States Department of Homeland Security
650 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Secretary Rubio and Secretary Noem:

We write to express our increasing concern about actions targeting international students by the State Department and by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Starting earlier this year, the State Department began revoking hundreds of student visas including on apparent ideological grounds, revoking roughly a hundred visas in California alone.¹ These revocations have been conducted by the State Department through its AI-enabled “Catch and Revoke” initiative, instructing affected students to leave the country voluntarily or risk facing deportation proceedings. At the same time, ICE began terminating Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) records for thousands of students—leaving them uncertain about their ability to continue their studies. This includes at least two hundred students in California.²

These visa revocations and record terminations constitute unprecedented and unconstitutional attacks on freedom of thought and expression that impact international and U.S. citizen students alike at our nation’s colleges and universities. While we welcome the news that the Administration has taken steps to rectify the SEVIS record terminations³, these actions taken all together still call into question our nation’s bedrock commitment to freedom of expression. We urge the State Department and DHS to suspend the “Catch and Revoke” initiative, which continues to cause uncertainty, erode due process, and chill free speech and expression among students.

Colleges and universities across the U.S. have long benefitted from the enrollment and participation of international students, who contribute immensely to academic, scientific, and cultural life at schools all around the country. This should not be a partisan issue—there are over 1.1 million international students

¹ Will Conybeare, *More Local Southern California Student Visas Being Revoked, This Time in Orange County*, KTLA (Apr. 16, 2025), <https://ktla.com/news/local-news/more-southern-california-student-visas-being-revoked-this-time-in-orange-county/>.

² *International Student Visas Revoked*, INSIDE HIGHER ED, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/global/international-students-us/2025/04/07/where-students-have-had-their-visas-revoked> (last visited May 1, 2025).

³ Zach Montague and Hamed Aleaziz, *U.S. Restores legal Status for Many International Students, but Warns of Removals to Come*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 25, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/25/us/politics/trump-student-visa-cancellations.html>.

all over the country, across many states, and the District of Columbia.⁴ California enrolls more than 140,850 international students who contribute approximately \$6.4 billion to our economy, supporting around 55,114 jobs.⁵ Nationally, over 1.12 million international students contribute roughly \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy and support over 370,000 jobs.⁶ They also strengthen our national security by fostering global partnerships, cross-cultural understanding, and long-term diplomatic ties with future world leaders educated in the U.S.⁷ By attracting top talent from around the globe, we bolster our workforce, drive innovation, and better position ourselves to maintain our competitive edge in science, technology, and research.⁸

In addition to the State Department visa revocations, multiple alarming incidents have surfaced in recent months involving international students detained by immigration enforcement at university campuses, ports of entry, and even in their homes.⁹ In a significant departure from normal practice, these students were, in many cases, not provided prior notice and given no time to contact an attorney, leaving many with few options to defend their nonimmigrant status and their ability to continue studying in the United States. Reports indicate that ICE has arrested students based on vague or previously disclosed information in their visa applications—such as social media posts, protest participation, or lawful political associations—as justification for their detention.¹⁰ If true, these practices represent not just an overreach of immigration authority but a violation of students’ First Amendment rights. These processes do not appear to be conducted with consideration for students’ due process and require immediate remediation.

The actions taken as part of the “Catch and Revoke” initiative suggest a troubling pattern of misusing immigration enforcement to suppress dissent, intimidate politically active students, and chill Constitutionally protected expression. Without transparency or independent oversight, the risk of abuse continues to grow. In fact, USCIS is now openly targeting speech by noncitizens with other immigration statuses, not just students.¹¹

California’s higher education system is the largest in the nation and considered one of the best in the world, driving global economic mobility—and fueling California’s growth into the fourth largest

⁴ *International Students in the United States 2024 Fast Facts*, OPENDOORS, https://opendoorsdata.org/fact_sheets/fast-facts/ (last visited May 1, 2025).

⁵ Rachel Banks, *The United States of America Benefits from International Students*, NAFSA (Nov. 11, 2024), <https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/EconValue2024.pdf>.

⁶ *International Students Contribute Record-breaking Level of Spending and 378,000 Jobs to the U.S. Economy*, NAFSA (Nov. 18, 2024), <https://www.nafsa.org/about/about-nafsa/international-students-contribute-record-breaking-level-spending-and-378000-jobs#:~:text=Washington%20%E2%80%93%20NAFSA%3A%20Association%20of%20International.and%20supported%20more%20than%20378%2C000>.

⁷ Michel Beine, Giovanni Peri & Morgan Raux, *The Contributions of Foreign Master’s Students to U.S. Start-Ups*, (Nat’l Bureau of Econ. Rsch., Working Paper No. 33314), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w33314>.

⁸ Phillip Connor, *Retaining U.S. International Student Graduates To Win The Global Talent Race*, FWD.US (2022), <https://www.fwd.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FWD-International-Student-Report-V6-012822.pdf>; (see Press Release, Senator Alex Padilla, Padilla Holds Hearing to Examine Impact Immigration Policies Have on Access to Higher Education and the Economy (June 14, 2022) (on file with author).

⁹ Bill Hutchinson, *What We Know About the Foreign College Students Targeted for Deportation*, ABC NEWS (Apr. 6, 2025, 9:00 PM), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/foreign-college-students-targeted-deportation/story?id=120210587>.

¹⁰ Karina Tsui, *What We Know About the Federal Detention of Student Activists, Students and Scholars Connected to Universities*, CNN (Apr. 2, 2025, 8:48 PM), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/31/us/what-we-know-college-activists-immigration-hnk/index.html>.

¹¹ Press Release, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, DHS to Begin Screening Aliens’ Social Media Activity for Antisemitism (Apr. 9, 2025) (on file with author).

economy in the world.¹² These institutions serve as beacons of opportunity and economic potential that transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of students in providing a better life for themselves, their families, and future generations. However, this Administration's attacks on institutions of higher education and international students, who add immense value to our universities, puts our nation's economic future at risk.

We urge your agencies to take immediate corrective action by suspending the Catch and Revoke initiative, restoring revoked visas, and providing full transparency to ensure that our immigration system is not misused to police speech at our colleges and universities and maintain beneficial international exchange at universities. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

¹² *California is now the 4th Largest Economy in the World*, GOVERNOR GAVIN NEWSOM (Apr. 23, 2025), <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/04/23/california-is-now-the-4th-largest-economy-in-the-world/>.