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November 13, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20528

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

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Secretary Pompeo:

I write to express serious concerns about the rule the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) proposed that truncates F, J, and I visa durations to a fixed time period (DHS Docket No. ICEB-2019-0006), and to urge DHS to rescind it. I ask that the Department of State (DoS) continue to provide visas along with the existing terms.

If implemented, the policy would require international students and representatives of foreign media outlets in the United States “who wish to remain in the United States beyond their specifically authorized admission period to apply for an extension of stay directly with USCIS or to depart the country and apply for admission with CBP at a port of entry (POE).” In addition to dramatically restricting the duration of stay for international students, and hindering their opportunity to complete their degrees, the rule also includes a xenophobic attempt to deny opportunities to promote America’s press freedoms by limiting the length of time foreign journalists are admitted into the country.

In 2018, Colorado hosted 11,888 international students across its institutions of higher education. In the classroom, international students bring unique perspectives and experiences that enrich the educational experience for all. Beyond the academic community, international students bring enormous benefits to our state. While Colorado hosted only a fraction of the 1.1 million total

international students in the United States last year, these students contributed \$470.7 million to the state's economy and supported over 6,000 jobs.<sup>1</sup>

The proposed rule will also undoubtedly harm the nation's institutions of higher education, including the numerous colleges and universities in Colorado. During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the federal government should take steps to assuage hardships for institutions of higher education to operate and preserve their financial stability. Colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher education rely on international students for diversity, research, and tuition revenue, and the proposed DHS rule will dramatically hinder these valuable contributions. The blanket fixed-year limit with no guarantee of an extension will also undermine colleges' and universities' ability to plan their budgets and anticipate their research capabilities. This Administration has added an unnecessary bureaucratic restriction by denying schools the opportunity to make appropriate decisions for their students, staff, and the broader community to reflect their unique situations. Institutions of higher education need a strong partner in the federal government, not an Administration that uses their students as a way to further abuse immigration policies.

International students tend to lean toward the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math, and contribute skills that support innovation and competition for our employers. This rule, coupled with executive orders to limit employment-based visas, undermines Colorado and the country's talent pipeline that is crucial to future economic competitiveness and stability. Requiring F, J, and I visa-holders to apply for an extension will exacerbate existing visa processing backlogs at DHS agencies, further complicating the application process.

Our state has a long history of welcoming individuals from all over the world to attend our institutions of higher education, allowing Colorado to continue a tradition of academic excellence. The proposed rule and other barriers against visas such as closed consulates and travel restrictions are undermining that tradition and our schools, students, and academic communities. Moreover, these barriers directly contradict our history as a nation of welcoming immigrants and creating economic opportunities for all.

I urge the Administration to rescind this harmful policy and instead promote immigration decisions that benefit Colorado's institutions of higher education and further our efforts to welcome and encourage immigrants to attend our universities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Bennet".

U.S. Senator Michael F. Bennet

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nafsa.org/isev/reports/state?state=CO&year=2018>