

Amherst College
Anna Maria College
Assumption College
Babson College
Bard College at Simon's Rock
Bay Path University
Becker College
Bentley University
Boston Architectural College
Boston Baptist College
Boston College
Boston University
Brandeis University
Cambridge College
Clark University
College of the Holy Cross
Curry College
Dean College
Elms College
Emerson College
Emmanuel College
Endicott College
Fisher College
Gordon College
Hampshire College
Harvard University
Labouré College
Lasell University
Lesley University
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MCPHS University
Merrimack College
MGH Institute of Health Professions
Montserrat College of Art
Mount Holyoke College
New England College of Optometry
Nichols College
Northeastern University
Olin College
Pine Manor College
Regis College
Simmons University
Smith College
Springfield College
Stonehill College
Suffolk University
Tufts University
Urban College of Boston
Wellesley College
Wentworth Institute of Technology
Western New England University
Wheaton College
William James College
Williams College
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

September 16, 2019

Honorable Members of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation:

As presidents of colleges and universities throughout Massachusetts, we write to share our concerns that recent developments in federal immigration policy are making it increasingly difficult for the Commonwealth's colleges and universities to attract and retain international students, faculty and researchers.

Our campuses are the anchors for our regional economy, attracting talented students, scholars, researchers and a growing list of companies from across the nation and around the world. International students and scholars contribute significantly to the Commonwealth's vibrant, knowledge-based economy, making Massachusetts the hub of academic excellence. In 2018, over 68,000 international students enrolled in Massachusetts colleges and universities, **contributing over \$3 billion to our economy**. They are an essential part of the educational experience on our campuses and critical to our research success. An environment that thwarts the opportunities for and contributions of these individuals is detrimental to the state's economy, undermines the educational experiences of all Massachusetts college students, and stifles future innovation and business growth.

Over the last few years, our students and institutions have faced a progressively burdensome and often unpredictable visa processing system. We depend on our ability to attract talented students and scholars from around the world, but the following policies are too often giving international students a reason to take their talents and contributions elsewhere:

- **Increased visa processing delays:** According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the average visa case processing time increased 46% over fiscal year (FY) 2017 – 2018. Our students and faculty are reporting increased incidents of “administrative processing,” where visa applications that otherwise meet all requirements are set aside by the State Department for further review – in some cases for as long as 3-4 months. Applicants receive little to no updates on their status while in “administrative processing,” often forcing them to miss parts of the academic year. We also continue to see impacts on students and scholars from countries affected by the travel ban in some cases because of a lack of a clear, workable waiver process and with Iranians whose student and scholar visas are supposedly exempt from the ban. These delays are directly impacting the competitiveness of U.S. companies by denying them access to high-skilled labor and limiting the ability of international students to contribute to the U.S. economy.

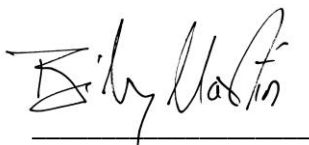
- **Increased processing delays for Optional Practical Training:** Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a critical component of the U.S. higher education system and an equally strong asset for participating employers. OPT allows foreign students to apply for “practical training” with a U.S. employer in a job directly related to their field of study, and this training can be completed prior to or after they have obtained their degree. OPT allows U.S. companies to access talented employees regardless of citizenship while building international connections that enhance U.S. competitiveness in the global economy.

OPT applications previously were processed within 90 days, but now the processing time has nearly doubled – taking up to five months. Since students are only allowed to apply for OPT a maximum of 90 days in advance, a delayed processing means students may be forfeiting 2 months of their employment authorization which impedes students from fulfilling work obligations and leaves companies short-staffed when their job offers cannot be fulfilled.

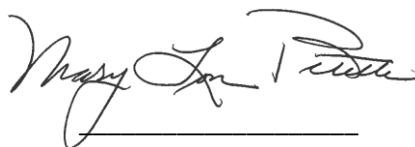
- **Increased Requests for Evidence:** As employers who seek to hire foreign-born employees to teach and work on campus, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of “Requests for Evidence” (RFE’s). These requests are made when the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS) needs additional information before rendering a decision. However, RFE’s for H-1B visa petitions more than doubled between the third and fourth quarters of FY 2017 – a staggering increase. These requests delay the issuance of visas for our faculty and staff by months, increase legal costs, and place our students and employees in limbo by prohibiting employment and travel while we await their status.
- **Uncertainties faced by students with valid visas:** The uncertainties that have come to dominate the immigration system continue even once an international student or scholar receives their visa. Students traveling to our campuses have had valid visas revoked when they are beginning their travel back to campus from overseas. There have also been several cases of students denied entrance when they arrive at Logan.

Though the issues sometimes tend not to get front page coverage, they are critical to the success of our universities, our faculty and our students. We appreciate your long-standing support and appreciation for Massachusetts’s higher education sector, and we ask that you continue to monitor and address these issues throughout the duration of the 116th Congress. We look forward to working together to maintain the Commonwealth’s high-skilled workforce and ensure that it remains the place where future students, researchers, and industries need to be to drive innovation.

Sincerely,



Bidy Martin
President
Amherst College



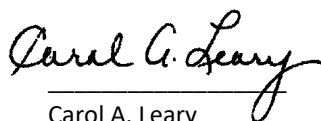
Mary Lou Retelle
President
Anna Maria College

Francesco C. Cesareo

Francesco C. Cesareo
President
Assumption College



Stephen Spinelli, Jr.
President
Babson College



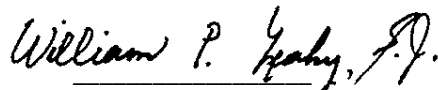
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Rev. David Melton
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Boston Baptist College



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Boston College



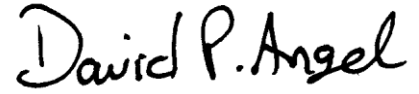
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Boston University



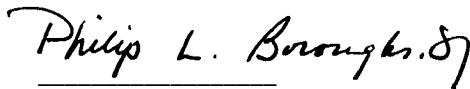
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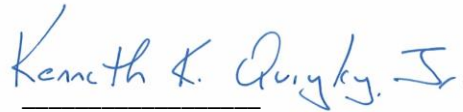
Deborah C. Jackson
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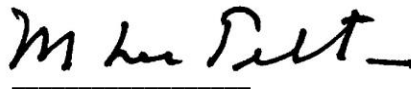
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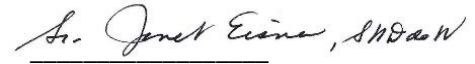
Paula M. Rooney
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Dean College



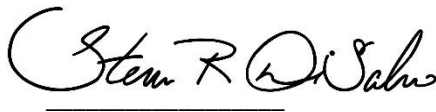
Harry E. Dumay
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Elms College



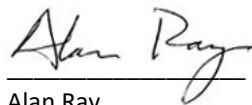
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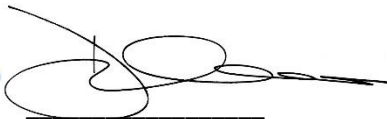
L. Rafael Reif
President
Massachusetts Institute of Technology



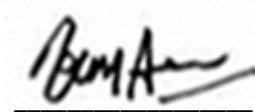
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President
MGH Institute of Health Professionals



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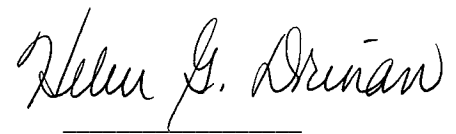


Joseph E. Aoun
President
Northeastern University


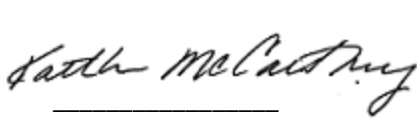


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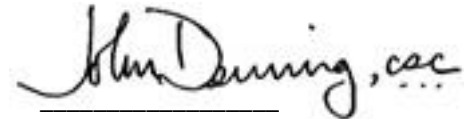


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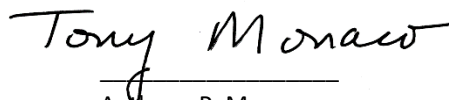
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Springfield College



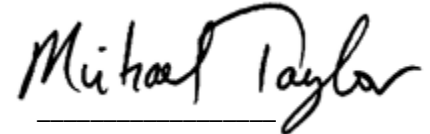
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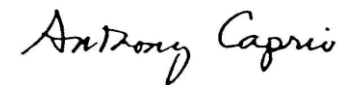


Michael Taylor
President
Urban College of Boston



Dr. Paula A. Johnson
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Wellesley College

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Wentworth Institute of Technology

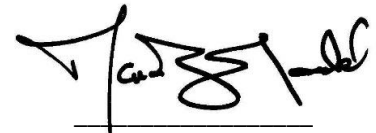


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