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September 23, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Room H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Room H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Room S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Room S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to ask for support and legislation to assist students and scholars who have been displaced by the current crisis in Afghanistan. While we and our institutions continue to support efforts to safely evacuate Afghan students and scholars who face danger under the Taliban, we are also starting to discuss how to offer longer-term assistance for those displaced by the crisis.

Bright and talented students and scholars, including many women, who were engaged in academic pursuits before the Taliban retook Afghanistan now face a variety of challenges. Some who were already in the United States are now concerned about how to continue to pay for or begin an education at a U.S. institution of higher education. Others are located in countries outside of Afghanistan and hope to study in the United States, while still others remain in Afghanistan and seek to continue or start their education in the United States.

Many of our institutions want to help and are offering support to those seeking to continue their education and begin their new lives. This includes raising scholarship funds for displaced students, placing scholars in U.S. graduate programs, and developing creative options for students seeking to transfer credits from Afghanistan institutions who may have destroyed their records.

We appreciate and are grateful that the House recently passed legislation to provide funding for Afghan refugees. We encourage Congress to provide additional support for displaced students and scholars seeking to study and continue their academic careers in the United States. Below are some specific ways Congress could support Afghan scholars and students in future legislation:

- Provide additional USAID funds to support Afghans who left Afghanistan on P-2 status and are currently in third countries waiting to travel to the United States. Some displaced scholars previously on USAID grants in Afghanistan are now in third countries and are unable to receive support from their USAID grant as funding was tied to work in Afghanistan.
- Require the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to designate Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED), which would allow those entering the United States on various visa programs to remain safe from deportation as they make life-altering decisions.
- Remove the non-immigrant intent for F-1, M-1, and J-1 student and scholar visa programs for Afghan students. We have already heard reports of students with Afghan citizenship applying to study in the United States from third countries being denied a student visa because they cannot demonstrate intent to return to Afghanistan after their program of study. If non-immigrant intent cannot be removed, the requirement should be satisfied by an intent to return when conditions in Afghanistan are normalized or to return to a third country.
- Require U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to waive the current rules around off-campus work for Afghanistan student visa holders by announcing special student relief for Afghan students in F and J status. Regulations allow DHS and the Department of State (DOS) to suspend or alter rules regarding duration of status, full course of study, and employment eligibility for specific groups of F-1 and J-1 students from parts of the world that are experiencing emergent circumstances.
- Any supplemental bills for Afghanistan should provide additional funding to USCIS and DOS to process the influx of Afghan visas and green card applications.
- Require DHS and DOS to consider all possible avenues of relief for Afghan nationals to remain in the United States to study, conduct research, and contribute to U.S. higher education as professors, faculty, and staff.

We look forward to working as closely as possible with the Administration and Congress to support displaced Afghans who wish to join the millions of international students and scholars who have contributed to the cultural and intellectual vibrancy of our campuses and to our national economic prosperity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Mitchell". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

ACPA-College Student Educators International
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of University Professors
American Astronomical Society
American Chemical Society
American Council on Education
American Geophysical Union
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Mathematical Society
American Physical Society
Association of American Colleges and Universities
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Research Libraries
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area
Council for Advancement and Support of Education
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council of Graduate Schools
Ecological Society of America
EDUCAUSE
ETS
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of System Heads
Optica (formerly OSA), Advancing Optics and Photonics Worldwide
Phi Beta Kappa Society
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association