

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Changes to High-Skill Visa Programs Show Need for Massive Reform

WASHINGTON (10 July 2020) – IEEE-USA, representing America’s technology professionals, calls on Congress to recognize that recent changes to America’s high-skill and student visa programs demonstrate the need for major reforms to these vital systems.

In recent weeks, the Administration has moved to restrict the use of green cards, block or restrict visa holders from certain countries, suspend temporary work visas, and limit the use of student visas. Overall, these changes will dramatically restrict America’s access to the world’s most innovative and productive people.

IEEE-USA does support some of the recent changes. For example, the decision to suspend the H-1B and L temporary visa programs will prevent abuses of these programs that are widespread and well documented. But because this policy change is so broad, it will create new problems, even as it helps to curb improper outsourcing practices.

“These recent changes illustrate how weak our high-skill immigration system is,” said 2020 IEEE-USA President Jim Conrad. “America needs a clear, clean and comprehensible high-skill immigration system. And right now we don’t have it.”

America’s process for skilled, educated, and innovative non-Americans – especially foreign students attending our universities in STEM fields – to become Americans is fundamentally flawed. Years of neglect, jerry-rigged legal patches and partisan band-aids have left us with a broken system. Americans in both parties support, by wide margins, making it easier for international STEM grad students educated in the U.S. to immigrate. The public understands that these immigrants are vital to our economy and essential to our nation’s long-term prosperity.

And yet, their path to citizenship is long, difficult, and very far from certain. Backlogs in the EB green card process have reached 500,000 people waiting for over a decade. America subjects our best international students to years of uncertainty and exposure to exploitation. Worse, we place some of the world’s most entrepreneurial souls on a shelf for many of their most productive years – preventing them from starting businesses and creating more jobs in this country – while they wait patiently for a green card.

The H-1B visa is frequently abused to outsource American jobs, yet it is also usually the only long-term visa available to students who want to remain in the United States after graduating. H-1B visas are not immigration visas and make workers easy to exploit, but they have become a primary pathway for skilled workers seeking to immigrate simply because nothing else is available.

Real, meaningful reforms to our country's high-skill immigration system are urgently needed. We call on Congress to create 50,000 new EB green cards specifically for international graduate students in the STEM fields. This would enshrine in law a direct bridge between our universities and citizenship, welcoming the world's most innovative, productive, and entrepreneurial people to join our country right after graduation.

The nearly 170,000 IEEE members in the United States, the men and women who will be most directly impacted by this change, believe in the value of immigration. Our current system is unjust and harmful to our country, and we need to do better. Congressional action is needed now to fix our broken high-skill system.

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About IEEE-USA:

IEEE-USA serves the public good and promotes the careers and public policy interests of nearly 180,000 engineering, computing and technology professionals who are U.S. members of IEEE, the world's largest technical professional organization.

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