



500 12th St SW #5600  
Washington, DC 20536  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

October 5, 2020

To Whom This May Concern:

As the largest grassroots, Iranian-American advocacy group in the United States, we would like to express our strong dissent for a newly [proposed rule](#) on September 25, 2020 by the Department of Homeland Security that would severely restrict international students from completing studies in the United States. While this would impact nationals of many countries, for nationals of many Middle Eastern and African nations - including Iran - the restrictions are doubly severe.

Under the proposed rule, DHS would limit those who were born in or are citizens of select countries “for a maximum period of up to 2 years.” Currently, most student visas are valid for the duration of studies, including for typical four year degrees, as well as advanced degrees such as Masters or Ph.D. programs. Instituting a hard two-year stop, with no guarantee of extension, would rule out such programs or impose severe restrictions on students’ ability to complete them.

Even though the proposed rule would give students the opportunity for a conditions-based extension through USCIS, such an extension appears to be limited and arbitrary. As a result, the change from duration of status to a hard expiration on authorized stay would strongly disincentivize Iranian students, and others, from applying to U.S. institutions. Most students would opt for alternative programs around the world, particularly in light of other restrictions the U.S. has implemented on Iranian nationals and other students from the world over.

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Successive administrations, including the Trump administration, have acknowledged the benefits of allowing Iranian students entry to the U.S. Proclamation 9645, more commonly known as the Muslim Ban, included an exemption for students, which helped it narrowly survive judicial scrutiny. While [68% of Iranians](#) were rejected for a visa as of September 2019 due to the Muslim ban, thousands of Iranian students continue to receive student visas, enrolling in prestigious American universities and enriching campus environments along the way. President Trump has [acknowledged](#) Iranian Americans as “one of the most successful immigrant groups in our country’s contemporary history.” Many of the most accomplished Iranian Americans today, who have contributed enormously to American innovation and culture, initially came to the United States on a student visa. It is imperative for the Iranian-American community not to have this narrow and vital opportunity for exchange between the U.S. and Iran close even further.

U.S. universities and tech companies will be worse off as a result of the new order, which would cut the U.S. off from highly educated, technically gifted Iranian students who have traditionally come in large numbers to the U.S. to pursue STEM careers and advanced degrees. As the former CEO of Google’s parent company Alphabet, Eric Schmidt, [stated](#) “Iran produces some of the top computer scientists in the world, and I want them here. To be clear, I want them working for Alphabet and Google!”

Moreover, the proposed rule makes no distinction for dual-nationals, seemingly applying to nationals and citizens of Iran regardless of the last time they set foot in Iran. For example, an Iranian-German dual citizen who left Iran over a decade ago would still likely be subject to the restrictions, as well as the child of an Iranian father born anywhere else in the world who has had citizenship passed down.

The proposed rule is vague in a number of important areas, raising additional concerns for the Iranian-American community. Would the proposed rule apply to students who have already been admitted and who would otherwise be able to stay until they complete their degrees? How would the proposed rule be applied to dual citizens, including those who may have never set foot in a

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country that is subject to the proposed two-year maximum stay? Lastly, what are the criteria for extensions and what is the likelihood that those enrolled in programs that last longer than two years will be able to extend their stay?

Given the stakes for the Iranian-American community and countless other immigrant groups, we implore the Department of Homeland Security to reverse this rule and call on Members of Congress to push back on this egregious attempt at stifling immigration and punishing the people of Iran and other nations for no benefit.

Respectfully,

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