



# NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

45 Temple Place, Boston, Massachusetts 02111-1305 • Phone 617.357.9620 • Fax 617.338.1577 • [www.nebhe.org](http://www.nebhe.org)

*Office of the President*

February 28, 2020

Members of the New England Congressional Delegation  
United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Senators and Representatives:

The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) writes to share its concerns that increasingly restrictive federal immigration policy and an isolationist climate threaten New England's capacity to attract and retain international students, faculty and researchers to our nearly 250 degree-granting colleges and universities.

NEBHE is a congressionally-authorized, interstate compact organization that brings together leaders in education, higher education, government, business and labor to address issues related to higher education, the economy and quality of life in the six-state region. For over 60 years, NEBHE has worked to support international education, research and development and the success of New England and its higher education institutions.

In addition to being anchors for the regional economy, our world-class colleges and universities have nurtured and created the international brainpower that has helped to build our innovation- and knowledge-based economy.

However, limiting visa policies and unwelcoming rhetoric undermine the education of all New England college students and stifle our region's growth and innovation. International students vote with their feet—simply opting to attend postsecondary institutions in other English-speaking countries. Or, having completed their educations in America, they take their knowledge and skills elsewhere around the world.

In 2018, more than 96,000 international students enrolled in New England colleges and universities, contributing over \$4.2 billion to the regional economy.

Because international students generally pay higher tuition and fees than U.S. students, they help boost the bottom lines at many campuses and increase institutional financial aid available to low-income domestic students who might otherwise not afford to attend college.

With the region's population growth rapidly slowing, educating and retaining foreign students offers New England a chance to boost its workforce and support our competitiveness in the global economy.

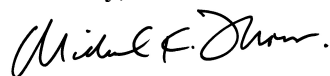
But the benefits of our robust international enrollment are not solely economic. International diversity on our campuses is important too. By interacting with students from other countries in classrooms and communities, all students learn to better understand, value and communicate with individuals from other political, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds—critical outcomes of higher learning.

As the second year of the legislative session begins, we ask for your support for:

- Congressional hearings to raise increased awareness of these issues and to:
  - Highlight the impact on postsecondary institutions, students, employers and communities;
  - Seek information from relevant executive and legislative branch leaders;
  - Inform proposals for improved policy, regulation and action in all areas of the Federal Government on these issues.
- Increased funding for international marketing and outreach efforts supporting postsecondary study by foreign students in the U.S.—to better compete with other English-speaking countries (who benefit from government marketing resources) and to counter negative perceptions abroad of U.S. postsecondary study opportunities.
- Increasing the cap on H1-B visas, encouraging international students to ply their skills and knowledge in the United States, rather than in competing countries. The cap on H1-B visas of 65,000 has not been expanded since 2005. In 2018, the number of applications reached to nearly 200,000.
- Expanding the eligibility for Optional Practical Training (OPT) Extension for F-1 students to other high-need fields outside of the designated STEM programs, such as nursing (51.3801) and teaching (13.1206). Students with an OPT extension can remain in the United States for an additional 24 months after participating in a pre-completion or post-completion OPT. Expanding the eligibility for OPT extension to additional fields would alleviate worker shortages, improve our economy and provide international students with additional opportunities post-graduation.
- Including funding to support expanded wraparound services for postsecondary students in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, including mental health care, advising and mentoring. These high-impact services boost completion rates of all students—and address gaps experienced by international students that prevent them from feeling connected to campus and community.

NEBHE stands ready to further represent the views and interests of college and university leaders from the region. We would be pleased to work with you to organize hearings in New England and to identify experts, leaders and advocates. In sum, we look forward to working with the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress to make sure that our nation remains an open and welcoming place where international students, researchers and entrepreneurs will help to drive innovation and collaboration.

Sincerely,



Michael K. Thomas  
President and CEO