

October 2, 2019

Zoe Lofgren, Chair
Ken Buck, Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren and Ranking Member Buck,

The American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM)¹ is pleased that the House Judiciary Committee's Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee held a hearing on September 24th of this year to examine the impact of the current Presidential Administration's travel ban. We commend the Subcommittee for its work on this issue, and we welcome this opportunity to express our concern regarding the ban's adverse impact on the scientific community.

¹The AAPM is the premier organization in medical physics, both in the U.S. and abroad. Medical physics is a scientific and professional discipline that uses physics principles to address a wide range of biological and medical needs. The mission of the AAPM is to advance medicine through excellence in the science, education and professional practice of medical physics. Currently, the AAPM represents approximately 9,000 medical physicists.

Medical physicists contribute to the effectiveness of medical imaging by ensuring the safe and effective use of radiant energy (e.g., optical, ionizing, ultrasonic, or radiofrequency) to obtain detailed information about the form and function of the human body. Medical physicists continue to play a leading role in the development of novel imaging technologies, as well as in guiding the optimization of existing imaging modalities. In addition, medical physicists contribute to development of new therapeutic technologies in radiation oncology, as well as in other disciplines, such as in thermal ablation or high intensity focused ultrasound. Clinically, medical physicists work side by side with radiation oncologists to design treatment plans and monitor equipment and procedures to ensure that cancer patients receive the prescribed dose of radiation at the correct location.

The story of Dr. Dehzangi and his wife is one example of how the current Presidential Administration's travel ban is tearing apart people's lives and negatively impacting the scientific community. Abdollah Dehzangi, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science at Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD represented the scientific community. He was invited to testify about how the ban has separated him from his wife, also a scientist, who is living outside the US. After her post-doctorate work outside the United States, she secured a job offer from the University of Maryland and applied for an I-130 petition, but was denied due to her Iranian nationality – despite the fact that she has not lived in Iran since she was a child. Dr. Dehzangi's testimony focused on the ban's impact on their lives together. His testimony also illustrated how the ban is damaging the larger scientific community.

AAPM's membership is composed of approximately 9,000 scientists, including approximately 1500 international members, whose clinical practice is dedicated to ensuring accuracy, safety and quality in the use of ionizing (e.g., X-rays) and non-ionizing (e.g., ultrasound) radiation in medical procedures such as medical imaging and radiation therapy. There is also a major research component to our field that is focused on discovery science, developing medical innovations, and identifying and implementing improvements in quality, efficacy, and safety in numerous medical imaging and therapeutic applications. Ultimately, it is patients who benefit from the research and clinical work of medical physicists.

We note that many scientific research projects are collaborations between multiple researchers at different institutions. Often, these collaborations are international. We believe that unimpeded communication is essential to bringing scientists from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints together so that science functions efficiently and effectively. AAPM's Annual Meeting is a forum that brings together thousands of medical physicists to discuss innovations in our field, to present novel research outcomes, and to obtain the continuing education necessary for them to maintain and advance their skills.

The AAPM Annual Meeting gives researchers an opportunity to present their work to others in the field and to defend their findings. These scientific meetings are also opportunities for medical physicists to network and foster the relationships that lead to new collaborative research opportunities. This networking is essential for young researchers, who rely on

mentorship from established researchers to advance in their field. Attending conferences and communicating in person is part of the practice of science. Researchers can work together for years on topics of mutual interest and in multi-disciplinary collaborations. The travel ban is destabilizing this work and causing enormous damage to the collaborative process.

The effects of the ban on the scientific community are far-reaching and place the United States in jeopardy of losing its preeminent scientific standing in the world. The ban damages the United States' capacity to attract the best and the brightest students and scientists. Because of the uncertainty created by the travel ban, these young superstars are electing to train and establish their careers in other countries – careers that could lead to new breakthroughs in medical diagnosis or therapy, potentially impacting millions of patients facing diseases such as Alzheimer's disease or cancer.

The AAPM has first-hand experience on the negative impact of the current travel ban, which has prevented some AAPM members from receiving visas to allow them to travel to the United States to present their research at our meetings. One recent example involves one of members, Habib Safigholi, PhD, who is an Associate Research Fellow in Medical Physics at the Carleton Laboratory for Radiotherapy Physics, which is located within the Physics Department of Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. We believe his visa was denied because he is an Iranian citizen.

Currently, Dr. Safigholi is pursuing post-doctoral training, which is a critical step in developing the skills necessary to become an independent investigator and to secure the research funding necessary to advance his work. He is already a seasoned researcher who has collaborated with international colleagues on a number of impactful studies related to medical physics and radiation oncology. He has presented his work at several prior AAPM Annual Meetings. This year, however, he was forced to withdraw his two accepted scientific paper presentations from our meeting because of the travel ban, robbing him of an important opportunity to interact with experts in his field, to build new relationships and collaborations, and to enrich many other attendees with his research findings.

Dr. Safigholi is one example of a much larger issue. Many other international scientists are being prevented from receiving visas, and many more will be denied visas in the coming

months and years. AAPM is concerned about the negative impact that this travel policy will have on the advancement of science in general, and more specifically, on the advancement of biomedical sciences. If we do not allow these scientists to train in the United States, they will go to other countries to do so, and the United States will lose access to extremely bright and talented young scientists. In many fields, the majority of students being trained in graduate programs in the United States are international students. The physical sciences, including medical physics, are some of these fields. By preventing international scientists from furthering their education and developing productive research careers within the United States, and by restricting the ability of international scientists to collaborate with American scientists, we are collectively undermining the United States' competitive edge and stifling scientific advancement.

We commend the Subcommittee's action to better understand the travel ban's impact on science. We believe the solution to the problem is clear: eliminate the travel ban and support international scientists who want to participate in scientific training and research in the United States—scientists who will help to advance science and improve the quality of life in our country, and across the world. Accordingly, we urge the Subcommittee to take decisive action to pressure or compel the current Presidential Administration to end the travel ban, a ban that is having a tremendously negative impact not only on international scientists, but on science as a whole.

Sincerely,



Cynthia H. McCollough, PhD, FAAPM, FACR, FAIMBE

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