AMERICAN ASSOCIATION of PHYSICISTS IN MEDICINE

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August 5, 2020

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

RE: House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship hearing on Oversight of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: Statement for the hearing record from AAPM.

Dear Chair Lofgren and Ranking Member Buck:

The American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM)[1] submits this statement for the hearing record expressing our extreme concern about the negative impact this Administration's immigration policies will have on American scientific advancement and advantage. We thank the Subcommittee for holding a hearing on the impact of the Administration's immigration policies and for including a witness from the scientific community who can speak to the effects these policies have on science.

For AAPM, scientific advancement means new and improved radiation therapies for cancer and other conditions as well as advanced diagnostic imaging. The United States is the premier destination for international scientists to work, research and pursue education. It is not in our interest to turn away these scientists who want to contribute their expertise to American research institutions and businesses.

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[1] The 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 over 9,000 medical physicists.

Medical physicists contribute to the effectiveness of medical imaging by ensuring the safe and effective use of various types of energy (e.g., optical, ionizing (x-ray, CT, nuclear medicine), ultrasonic, or radiofrequency (MRI)) 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. They also perform quality assurance tests on radiographic, fluoroscopic, CT, nuclear medicine, ultrasound, and MRI equipment to ensure the highest image quality at the lowest possible dose to the patient.

Soon after taking office, this Administration moved to prohibit foreign nationals of certain countries from entering the United States. Executive Orders and Presidential Proclamations now collectively restrict the ability of members of the scientific community to enter the U.S. to attend professional meetings, collaborate on research, advance scientific innovation or study. These restrictions gnaw away at the U.S.'s competitive advantage in scientific advancements and the country's ability to remain a leader in the global scientific enterprise.

Most recently, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) attempted to cancel visas that it had awarded to international students in higher education if the student was enrolled in a completely virtual course schedule for the fall semester. The guidance issued by ICE would have had a significant negative impact on many academic institutions and their students, particularly those with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs.

Beginning in undergraduate programs, international science students are learning about, and contributing to, scientific research that will directly benefit the United States. International graduate students play an important role in educating other students and advancing U.S. research. Moreover, many of these students stay in the U.S. after graduation and contribute to the U.S. scientific enterprise.

For example, students studying medical physics are engaged in research endeavors including, but not limited to, developing computer-aided diagnosis algorithms, predictive medical imaging tools, novel radiation therapy delivery techniques, and knowledge-based algorithms to automate radiation therapy treatment planning. This research will advance devices, software, and methods used to detect, treat, and prevent cancer, cardiovascular disease, eye and ear disorders, stroke, and many other serious health problems, ultimately improving the efficiency, safety, and quality of medical imaging and radiation therapy used on American patients.

Our higher education system is a pipeline for securing the best and brightest in their field to dedicate their unique skill sets towards scientific advancement in our country, but we believe that initiatives like this latest ICE action would permanently destroy America's main competitive advantage in attracting the best and brightest individuals from around the world to study and work here.

Thankfully, the Administration did not pursue this policy after facing significant external pressure, but each attempt by the Administration to limit immigration of students and scientists inflicts lasting damage by creating an environment of instability in the U.S. that pushes students and scientists to look elsewhere for educational or professional opportunities and severely limits the U.S. from recruiting and retaining the most talented scientists.

We urge the Subcommittee to take steps that would continue our country's leadership in all the fields of science – including medical physics – by using all tools at its disposal to reverse these harmful immigration policies and prevent new versions from being introduced. We also encourage the Subcommittee to continue investigating the effects these immigration policies have on the scientific community. Specifically, we ask the Subcommittee to more closely study and assess the effects that these policies have on America's scientific enterprise.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional expertise or resources to you as you formulate legislation and continue your oversight activities. If you would like to further discuss our concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Richard J. Martin, JD, Government Relations Project Manager, at 571-298-1227 or (richard@aapm.org).

Sincerely,

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