



FASEB

Federation of American Societies
for Experimental Biology

Representing Over 130,000 Researchers

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May 14, 2021

Samantha Deshombres
Regulatory Coordination Division Chief
Office of Policy and Strategy
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, MD 20746

RE: Docket Number USCIS-2021-0004, “Identifying Barriers Across U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Benefits and Services”

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the [request for public input](#) regarding barriers across U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) benefits and services. As a coalition of 29 biological and biomedical scientific societies representing over 130,000 individual scientists, FASEB recognizes international scholars as critical members of the U.S. research enterprise. In [comments](#) submitted by FASEB last year regarding a [proposed rule change affecting F and J visa holders](#), we expressed concerns about additional burdens imposed upon international scholars. Such burdens threaten our nation's competitiveness by discouraging future scientists from pursuing educational programs in the U.S. and performing the cutting-edge research vital for biomedical progress. Therefore, we strongly recommend that DHS rescind the proposed rule as a key step to reducing barriers for temporary visa holders pursuing STEM education and research opportunities in the U.S.

Current international students and researchers on F and J visas are legally admitted to the U.S. for “duration of status” (D/S), typically the length of their program. The changes proposed in DHS Docket ICEB-2019-0006 were framed as intending to enhance national security and allow for better tracking of nonimmigrant compliance with visa requirements. Given that the average time to a PhD for 2018 graduates was 5.8 years, the proposed maximum four-year limit would mean nearly all international PhD students would have to apply for an extension, with no guarantee for approval. Added administrative burdens and uncertainty would likely discourage international students from enrolling in programs in the U.S., decreasing university and institutional revenue due to loss of tuition (acknowledged by DHS in the cost analysis) and talent.

Under current regulations, applications for extensions are reviewed by Designated School Officials (DSOs) and Alternate or Responsible Officers (AROs/ROs). DHS Docket ICEB_2019-0006 proposed changes that would require F and J nonimmigrant aliens also to apply for an extension of stay (EOS) with DHS or leave the country and reapply for admission at a port of entry. Per DHS's own analysis, most costs incurred by the proposed rule would fall on nonimmigrant applicants in the form of increased paperwork, fees, time, and travel outside of the country or for in-person biometrics collection and interviews. [FASEB](#) and the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) have previously noted the financial stresses faced by trainees. For graduate students and postdoctoral scholars living on limited stipends, the financial cost of applying for an EOS poses an undue burden. The added paperwork, biometrics, and interview appointments will result in not only loss of time but also increased stress. Lack

of consideration for the wellbeing of our scientific workforce will have lasting individual and systemic effects.

FASEB recognizes that USCIS supports a range of populations seeking lawful immigration to the U.S. Our comments focus on a proposed rule that would greatly increase administrative and financial burdens for international scholars and research institutions, negatively affecting their ability to contribute to the robust U.S. research and development enterprise. Therefore, we urge DHS to rescind this proposed rule and explore strategies that impose fewer financial and administrative burdens for both visa holders and sponsoring institutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louis B. Justement". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping loop at the end of the name.

Louis B. Justement, PhD
FASEB President