

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mitchell McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Leaders Schumer and McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

We are writing on behalf of students and student governments at [x] universities representing over [y] students across the nation. We support policies that recognize the vital role graduate researchers play in bolstering American innovation and maintaining American economic competitiveness, and we encourage lawmakers to support these future leaders of research.

As you continue to negotiate the Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations, we strongly urge you to fully fund the NSF for the Future Act, passed as part of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022. This bill contains provisions critical to supporting the current backbone and future leaders of innovation and research. If America is not to cede its competitive edge, investment in the STEM workforce is critical.

To that end, we particularly urge full funding at the authorized levels for the following provisions in Title III - National Science Foundation for the Future of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022:

- Section 10313(a)(5)(D) - Funding research addressing root causes of graduate student mental health & developing effective interventions will enable the elimination of the systemic problems causing graduate students to have symptoms of anxiety and depression at [6 times the rate of the general population](#).
- Sections 10531-10539 - [Combatting sexual harassment in science](#) is critical to making the research environment safe and inclusive for all, particularly as graduate students are low in the academic hierarchy and are thus disproportionately harassed.
- Sections 10621 and 10524 - Investments in regional technology hubs and MSI Centers of Innovation enables increased participation and contributions from scientifically underserved communities, broadening the STEM talent pool.

Additionally, we wish to highlight the fellowships, including the NSF GRFP, authorized throughout other sections of CHIPS and Science as an excellent funding model that financially frees graduate researchers from principal investigators, disrupting the hierarchy that contributes to the problems being addressed in some of the above provisions.

- Title I Section 10104(a), 10113(a) and (b); Title III Sections 10313(b), 10321, 10393

With substantial investments, these provisions significantly bolster the STEM workforce pipeline and strengthen American innovation and global competitiveness. Without them, the American research environment will languish and cede its edge.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. If you would like to discuss the importance of graduate education and research for driving American innovation and economic growth or to discuss these recommendations further, please reach out to us at gsc-eab-fed@mit.edu.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Lane

Chair, External Affairs Board
MIT Graduate Student Council
Doctoral Candidate, LIGO Laboratory
MIT Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space
Research
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, MA

Katherine Jordan

Vice President External Affairs
CMU Graduate Student Assembly
Doctoral Candidate
Engineering and Public Policy
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA

Mason Ng

Vice Chair, External Affairs Board
MIT Graduate Student Council
Doctoral Candidate
MIT Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space
Research
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, MA

Christine Cao

Federal Affairs Subcommittee Chair
CMU Graduate Student Assembly
Doctoral Student
Engineering and Public Policy
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA

On behalf of:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate Student Council
Carnegie Mellon University Graduate Student Assembly

October 27th, 2022

Assistant Secretary Rena Bitter
Bureau of Consular Affairs
2201 C St NW, Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter,

As graduate student governments representing students at **XX** universities representing **YY** total students, we urge the Bureau of Consular Affairs to reduce lengthy wait times for nonimmigrant visas.

The average wait for a visitor just to get a visa interview appointment is [about 250 days](#). In some cities, the wait time for an interview appointment is [multiple years](#). As of November 2nd, the wait times in Mumbai, New Delhi, Bogota, and Abuja are 939 days, 914 days, 885 days, and 786 days, respectively. Student visa wait times may also be lengthy, with the longest wait times including Yerevan (557 days), Hyderabad (405 days), and Abuja (338 days).

Attracting top talent to the US from other countries is a critical priority to maintain our national leadership in innovation and development of critical technologies. The US has long prioritized bringing the best and brightest students from around the world to our universities; improved visa facilitation is vital to uphold this goal. If wait times remain this high, top students will take their talents elsewhere.

Long wait times for student and visitor visas both directly affect graduate students and their families. Students admitted to top-tier US universities may want to visit campuses with their family members. Wait times prevent them from securing housing, exploring the city, and getting used to the community they will spend years in. We've heard from students at numerous universities who have been unable to enter the US until the start of the school year. In some cases, this has led to students signing leases without ever seeing the property, then finding the dwelling in disrepair. Numerous [media reports](#) also indicate students [preferring other countries](#) over the US given the difficulty in obtaining a US visa. Such concerns add to the already stressful experience of beginning a graduate program, deterring top international talent from pursuing post-bachelor education in the US.

In addition, we have heard that many student's families are unable to travel to the US for important milestones like graduation, marriages, the birth of a child, or medical emergencies. This is particularly resonant for graduate students. In the US, the median time to complete a doctoral degree is nearly [six years](#). Obtaining a doctorate is an enormous milestone, and students understandably want the opportunity to celebrate with their families upon completion. Additionally, many graduate students get married or start families while pursuing a graduate degree. With current visa interview wait times, it is impossible for student's families to be present for such life events.

We urge the State Department to do its part to facilitate travel by processing visas efficiently and quickly without compromising on safety. We deeply appreciate the work that the Bureau of Consular Affairs undertakes and it is our desire to cooperate with the Department of State to address these prolonged wait times. Remedying multi-year wait times will encourage more top talent to pursue their education in the US, as they will be able to visit prospective universities and their family members will more easily be able to enter the US.

Sincerely,

Carnegie Mellon University Graduate Student Assembly
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate Student Council