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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1313

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October 9, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Tony H. Pham
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the
Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Senior Official Pham,

I write to urge the Department's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to provide full and fair consideration to quickly remove a potential barrier facing international transfer students who wish to begin their university studies in person in the spring.

International students contribute to the knowledge, research and cultural diversity of the universities in my district, while also creating jobs and economic growth. According to data from NAFSA: Association of International Educators, international students contribute over \$540 million to Illinois' 13th congressional district, and support over 7,500 jobs. The district includes the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) which, with over 11,000 international students, is one of the top destinations for international students in the country.

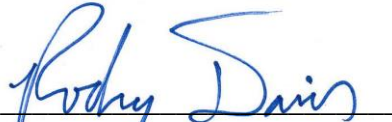
As in previous years, a number of the international students who committed to attend universities for the 2020-21 academic year were already inside the United States and requested to transfer from their current school. As you know, SEVP closely tracks holders of F-1 student visas through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database. Accordingly, those students' SEVIS records were transferred to their new universities so that they could begin a new program of study. However, some of these students left the U.S. before the school year began and ended up not returning to the U.S. for the new academic year, either by choice or because they were unable to travel due to the pandemic. In some cases, they opted to begin their program online overseas, while others chose to defer their studies to a future semester.

Universities are required to keep SEVIS records up to date but they are unable to make changes in these cases as the records cannot be registered because the students are not currently in the U.S. and have not reported to school. SEVIS also does not permit Designated School Officials to defer the start dates of transfer students. Unless the records are updated in the coming days – within 60 days of when the students' program began – they will terminate automatically. That will result in the students being flagged for having violated their status, potentially preventing

them from getting new entry visas or entering the US in the future to begin their studies in person.

Unless SEVP takes immediate action to allow these records to be activated or deferred, over 250 students at UIUC alone may be impacted, and potentially tens of thousands more at universities across the country. Accordingly, I urge your full and fair consideration of taking swift action to find a solution that ensures those students' records do not automatically terminate, and that universities do not face additional difficulty enrolling international students in the spring. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rodney Davis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Rodney Davis
Member of Congress