September 25, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are a group of associations that represent the sponsors, businesses, and industries which recruit, host, and support J-1 participants every year. We are writing to urge you to defend privately funded exchange programs against potential elimination or significant changes under the Buy American, Hire American (“BAHA”) Executive Order.

The Executive Order does not directly identify J-1 visa programs as an area of concern. Multiple sources, however, are reporting that senior White House staff are embarking a plan to eliminate or significantly cut a number of programs, including Summer Work Travel, Intern/Trainee, Camp Counselor, Au Pair, and potentially others.

If adopted, the Executive Order implementation would cripple our diplomacy efforts. Privately funded J-1 exchange programs cost U.S. taxpayers virtually nothing. What they add to our country, however, is significant. These programs bring the world’s best and brightest to the U.S., where they engage personally with American citizens and communities. They take back to their home countries a better image and deeper understanding of the United States.

The effects of the BAHA restrictions could be devastating. In fact, a recent study by EurekaFacts shows that many of the businesses we represent could not operate without the Summer Work Travel (SWT) program. Roughly half of the employers represented in the study reported that without the SWT program they would have to reduce hours of operation, and over one quarter said they would be unlikely to be able to stay open for the full season, thus impacting American employees. That same study found that SWT is neither the cause of, nor associated with unemployment in the United States. Instead, J-1 programs serve to facilitate cultural exchange and support businesses in tourist areas that are facing labor shortages. Furthermore, SWT participants contributed more than $500 million to the U.S. economy in 2016 via the money they spent in the country, at an average of $5300 per participant.

Summer camps, which by necessity are largely in rural areas with small year-round populations, would be similarly impacted without J-1 Camp Counselors. The program exposes young American campers to cultures from around the world, and allows camps to stay open longer and serve more campers. J-1 interns and trainees gain valuable professional experience and strengthen international business relationships. Finally, the J-1 Au Pair program supports working families and provides strong ties between Americans and young people from foreign countries.

As you know, the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program enjoys broad bi-partisan support. In fact, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved an amendment on September 7 designed to protect these programs from potential changes except through the formal rulemaking process. The legislation also requires consultation with the Appropriations Committees in both chambers and an analysis of the impact on our public diplomacy and economy from such changes before they are made.
An impact analysis is particularly important because the elimination of these programs would devastate many communities and hinder our diplomatic efforts. We urge you to defend privately funded exchange programs and ensure that the programs aren’t included as part of the BAHA implementation. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Alliance for International Exchange
Alaska Hotel & Lodging Association
American Hotel & Lodging Association
Association of Pool and Spa Professionals
Branson Lakes Area Lodging Association
California Hotel & Lodging Association
California Ski Industry Association
International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA)
Maine Innkeepers Association
Maine Restaurant Association
Massachusetts Hotel & Lodging Association
Michigan Lodging & Tourism Association
Minnesota Lodging Association
Minnesota Resort and Campground Association
Montana Hotel and Lodging Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Ski Areas Association
New Jersey Business & Industry Association
North Carolina Restaurant & Lodging Association
Ocean City (MD) Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association
Ohio Travel Association
Pacific Northwest Ski Areas Association
Ski New Hampshire
Ski Utah
Texas Hotel & Lodging Association
U.S. Travel Association
Virginia Beach Hotel Association
West Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association
Wisconsin Hotel & Lodging Association
World Waterpark Association
Wyoming Lodging & Restaurant Association
WYSE Travel Confederation