

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to express our deep displeasure with the Department of State's ongoing grant disbursement freeze for educational and cultural exchange programs and ask that you immediately unfreeze funding intended for grant distribution in the Payment Management System (PMS). **Without a release of funding and clearly defined process, American citizens run the risk of being stranded overseas with no resources to support their stipends, housing, or logistics to bring them home.**

On February 12, 2025, the Department of State announced a temporary pause on payments with absolutely no advanced notice to grant recipient organizations. Programs that cover educational and cultural exchange programs are funded in Title I of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act and are not a part of the 90-day foreign assistance review process. The 15-day pause of grant distribution ended on February 27, 2025. However, despite the end of the distribution pause, exchange program funding has not resumed, putting current American exchange students and faculty at risk abroad.

There are at least 3,500 American high school, college, and professionals abroad on Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) programs outside of the United States. A further 9,100 American students and professionals are set to participate in exchange programs and 17,500 international students expected to arrive in the United States in the next six months. More than 700 Americans working with Department of State educational and cultural exchanges have already been furloughed or laid off. Without lifting the freeze on grant disbursements more than 8,000 Americans who work on program administration will be at risk of losing their livelihoods.

Programs like the renowned Fulbright, Gilman, and Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) programs are impacted by the funding pause. Professional exchange programs including the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), and young leader's initiatives such as YALI, YSEALI, and YLAI are seeing major impacts by the freeze. High school exchange program freezes on the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES), Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX), and Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) programs limit our high schoolers from experiencing new cultures and world politics. Even virtual exchanges like the J. Christopher Stevens Initiative are unable to continue without the funding pause being undone.

Your Department's educational and cultural exchange programs are a major part of our investment in young Americans and relationship building with future leaders abroad. The Department of State's exchange programs are an important component of U.S diplomacy, more

than 40 foreign participants have gone on to hold important leadership positions, including former and current heads of state or government. These exchange programs strengthen bilateral relationships, enhance national security and alliances, and make America stronger.

About 90% of State Department funding dedicated to these programs is either spent on Americans or on American soil. International visitors who come to the U.S. on federally funded exchange programs bring critical resources to communities across the U.S. Many foreign governments financially contribute to these bilateral programs, ensuring shared responsibilities with the United States. In addition, the economic contributions of foreign students to the United States between 2022-2023 was more than \$40 billion. These exchanges have a long track record of making America stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

On any exchange program, participants' health, safety, and welfare is paramount. We cannot leave students who are already overseas – many of them Pell grant recipients – without funding to sustain their day to day lives. We cannot leave exchange participants currently on program in the U.S. in limbo without access to the grant funding that allowed them to come here in the first place. It is unsafe for this prolonged slowdown of funds to continue to negatively impact American exchange participants abroad and international exchange participants in the U.S. when the 15-day pause has already expired. We urge you to release funds in their entirety, to communicate transparently with implementers about any new review proves in place to ensure the safety and security of American citizens overseas, and to preserve key bilateral relationships throughout the entire world.

Additionally, we request that the Department of State explain why grant funding has not resumed along with explanations to the following questions.

1. What kinds of reviews have been happening during this pause, and to what end?
2. When do you expect this temporary pause to be lifted, and when will grantee reimbursements and payments begin to again be made?
3. What are your plans to ensure that the participants currently on ECA programs – including the 3,500 Americans who are abroad right now – are supported and their health, safety, and welfare is not put at risk?
4. If there is a waiver process or processes underway, what are the criteria for receiving a waiver?
5. Have any exchange grants been terminated? And if so, which ones?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to a prompt reply.

Sincerely,

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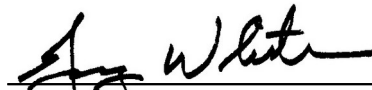
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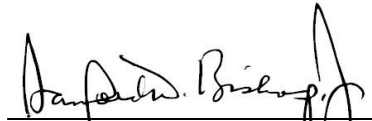
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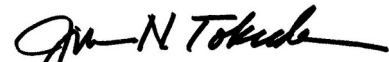
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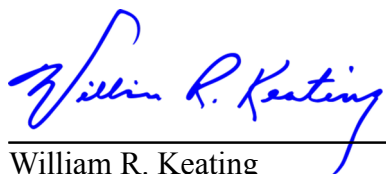
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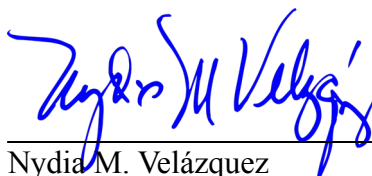
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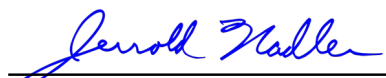
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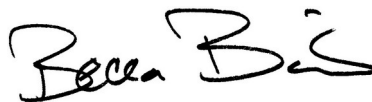
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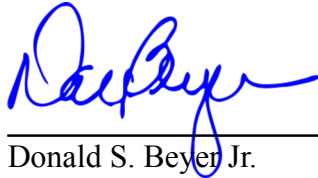
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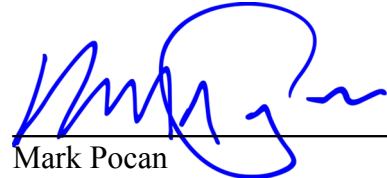
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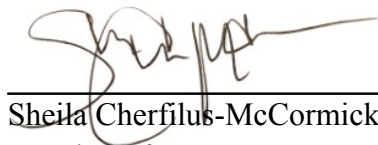
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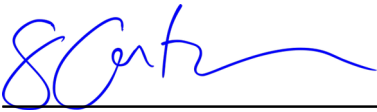
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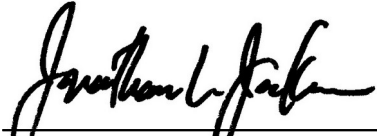
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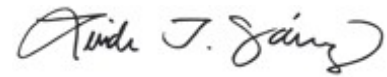
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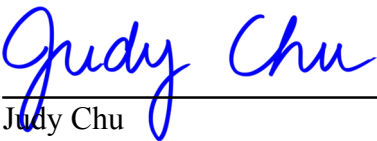
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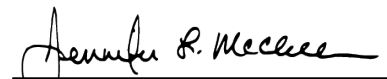
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