The Honorable Antony Blinken

U.S. Department of State

Office of the Secretary

Harry S. Truman Building

2201 C Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20520

CC: The Honorable Brian McKeon, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Budget

 Ian Brownlee, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs

 Matt Lussenhop, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs

April 14, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the residents of the State of Texas, and the colleges and universities I represent in my district, I urge your immediate action to resume visa processing at embassies and consulates around the world for international students, scholars and professors. This is an urgent request, as time is of the essence if our universities are to have a chance at welcoming international students this fall.

I understand that Consular Affairs is operating on a reduced workload and prioritizing American Citizen Services. While I do not object to this prioritization, I would support the State Department use of video conferencing or videotelephony tools to resume processing for the academic categories. Otherwise, U.S. universities will face another year of little to no international students.

The absence of international students and scholars is devastating for our universities and for the U.S.’s position as the top destination for international students. You likely know that international students contributed more than $2 billion and more than 22,000 jobs to Texas alone in 2019. Moreover, university research relies on international cooperation, U.S. students are positively benefited by global diversity on campus, our universities are greatly supported by the tuition and know-how international students contribute, and our global rankings are impacted by the level of internationalization we achieve at all levels. To avoid further interruption already encountered due to the pandemic it is critical to resume welcoming international students, scholars and professors back to our universities.

I also point out that the current blanket prohibitions to J and F academic category applicants are negatively impacting the operation of our colleges. Universities have proven themselves effective at containing the spread of COVID-19 and have the resources to continue to mitigate challenges that could arise. In addition, we may utilize the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Department of Homeland Security Student Exchange Visitor Program systems currently in place to exercise additional oversight and monitoring over sponsors of J-1 and F-1 visas.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.