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November 9, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528

Sent electronically via regulations.gov

Re: 8 CFR Part 214; No. ICEB-2026-0100

Dear Secretary Mullin,

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR), representing over 10,400 rheumatologists and rheumatology interprofessional team members, appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) proposed rule establishing new fees for Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment pursued by F-1 student visa holders. The rule proposes a $70,000 fee for each F-1 student engaging in an OPT opportunity and $30,000 for subsequent OPT opportunities.

Though this proposed rule has the goal of ending "systemic abuse of the OPT system" by employers, who purportedly hire foreign students to reduce their tax burden, there is no evidence that the OPT program has negative effects on American workers. A 2022 study by the National Bureau for Economic Research (NBER) found that rather than depressing local labor markets, international students tend to fill labor shortages in fields without enough workers.[i] Furthermore, there is no evidence that foreign students participating in the OPT program reduce job opportunities or wages for American workers. In fact, the number of foreign students approved for OPT is associated with a lower overall unemployment rate.[ii]

The U.S. is currently encountering a projected shortfall of nearly 200,000 physicians by 2036.[iii] International students will play a significant role in filling this gap, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Physicians working with H-1B sponsorship are a major segment of the medical workforce in areas with significant shortages of practitioners. An October 2025 study found that some rural counties depend on H-1B physicians for 1 in 3 to 1 in 5 of their practicing doctors.[iv] OPT is a critical pipeline into H-1B sponsorship and stable employment for many international students, with 34% of H-1B visa holders having transitioned from F-1 student visas.[v] A decline in H-1B workers would disproportionately impact rural areas where H-1B health care workers often are employed. [vi]

Evidence indicates that the OPT program, rather than reducing opportunities for American workers, tends to act as a safety valve for tight labor markets and a source of workers in the counties that most need them. Studies have also found that areas with more foreign-born STEM workers have higher patenting rates, faster productivity growth and higher earnings among U.S. natives, suggesting that the presence of international students actually contributes to local economic growth.[vii]

The fees introduced in the proposed rule would be harmful not just to international students but to the local economies to which they contribute and in which they often occupy critical roles. Rather than improving opportunities for U.S. workers, these fees would amount to a tax on U.S. academic institutions and reduce the desirability of the U.S. as a destination for top international talent.

Please contact Sweta Haldar, MSPH, ACR Manager of Regulatory Affairs, at shaldar@rheumatology.org or (202) 807-5262 should you have any questions or if we can provide additional assistance.

Sincerely,



Amanda Myers, MD, FACR
Chair, Government Affairs Committee
American College of Rheumatology

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[i] https://www.nber.org/papers/w30431
[ii] https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/International-Students-STEM-OPT-And-The-US-STEM-Workforce.NFAP-Policy-Brief.March-2019.pdf
[iii] https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/6084852-training-american-doctors/
[iv] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12573110/
[v] https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2025/skilled-immigration-chopping-block-effects-eliminating-optional
[vi] https://www.kff.org/quick-insights/the-trump-administrations-proposed-103265-fee-for-h-1b-visas-could-affect-the-health-care-workforce/
[vii] https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/International-Students-STEM-OPT-And-The-US-STEM-Workforce.NFAP-Policy-Brief.March-2019.pdf