



Fact Sheet on Exchange Visitor Program Provision In Fiscal Year 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Bill

SPECIAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 7034. (d) DIRECTIVES AND AUTHORITIES.—

(5) EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM.—None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to modify the Exchange Visitor Program administered by the Department of State to implement the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended, (Public Law 87–256; 22 U.S.C. 2451 et seq.), except through the formal rulemaking process pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act and notwithstanding the exceptions to such rule-making process in such Act: Provided, That funds made available for such purpose shall only be made available after consultation with, and subject to the regular notification procedures of, the Committees on Appropriations, regarding how any proposed modification would affect the public diplomacy goals of, and the estimated economic impact on, the United States.

The Alliance for International Exchange thanks Congress for protecting the U.S. Department of State's J-1 visa Exchange Visitor Programs in the recently passed Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 omnibus appropriations bill. The bill includes a provision reflecting strong support for exchange programs that are vital to U.S. national security and economy.

Initially approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee, the final FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act contains specific requirements that Exchange Visitor Programs must remain the same as currently enacted in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, unless the U.S. Department of State goes through a transparent, formal rulemaking process and actively consults with Congress.

Such a regulatory process would allow stakeholders to comment on proposed changes and its impact on our national security and regional economies, and require the U.S. Department of State to address concerns raised. Further, the FY 2018 bill requires the U.S. Department of State to consult with Congress before implementing any changes to the Exchange Visitor Program, and to justify to Congress how such changes would "affect the public diplomacy goals of, and the estimated economic impact on, the United States."

The Alliance and its 90-member organizations, as well as more than 1,000 American seasonal businesses and 26,000 families that host exchange visitors, voiced support for J-1 exchange programs. We expressed our concerns regarding changes being considered to curtail – or even eliminate – these exchange programs.

With this legislation, Congress demonstrated strong support that J-1 exchange programs are good for the United States, diplomatically and economically. For example, in the Summer Work Travel (SWT) program, three-quarters of SWT participants said they had a better image of the United States, American culture and people after participating in the program. Moreover, a recent study showed how SWT contributes approximately \$5,300 per participant to local economies, for more than a half-billion dollar impact nationally. It does so without negatively affecting regional youth employment opportunities.

For many seasonal communities and working families, J-1 Exchange Visitor Programs keep their businesses operating, providing Americans with greater economic stability and prosperity. We appreciate Congress' strong support for J-1 exchange programs and look forward to continuing working together in furthering U.S. diplomatic and economic successes.