April 7, 2017

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Leahy:

Thank you for your continued support of U.S. Department of State Educational and Cultural Exchange programs, which are a proven and cost-effective way for the United States to remain internationally competitive, develop American leaders, engage current and future international leaders, and promote American values. These programs support the global engagement that is critical to our country’s prosperity and security. Unfortunately, the President’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget blueprint significantly reduces funding for almost all of these programs. We request that you continue Congress’s long bipartisan support for State Department’s exchange programs by maintaining Fiscal Year 2017 funding levels.

With Congress’ support, the range of State Department exchange programs connect emerging leaders, entrepreneurs, youth, educators, and athletes from the United States to others in more than 160 countries around the world, dramatically increasing America’s global reach. Exchanges are a key instrument in the U.S. foreign policy toolbox and essential to strengthening U.S. global leadership, while building respect and a web of partnerships based on shared interests and mutual ties around the world. Results repeatedly show that participants visiting the United States through exchange programs return to their home countries with a better impression of our country, the American people, and our values. U.S. ambassadors consistently rank exchange programs among the most useful catalysts for long-term political change and mutual understanding.

To date, there are more than one million alumni of State Department exchange programs. Exchange program alumni include more than 395 current and former Heads of State, more than 1,700 cabinet-level ministers, and key leaders from around the world.

Support from Congress allows the State Department to strategically align its programs with key U.S. foreign policy interests and to facilitate exchange experiences for more than 55,000 American and international exchange participants each year, including:

- Bringing emerging and future leaders – many of them from countries key to U.S. national security interests – to the U.S. on programs like the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program for high school students from Eurasia; the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program between the U.S. and countries with significant Muslim
populations; the Young Leaders Initiatives in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Americas; and the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP);

- Engaging students from around the world in the Peer 2 Peer Challenging Extremism program to develop campaigns and social media strategies against extremism;
- Supporting international innovation and collaboration in technology through programs like TechWomen and TechGirls;
- Expanding opportunities for young Americans, including students receiving Pell Grants, to study abroad through the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program;
- Continuing to engage students and scholars through the renowned Fulbright Program; and
- Engaging and training young professionals through programs such as the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX);

Finally, State Department exchange programs are a cost-effective investment that provides significant and immediate economic impact in communities across the country. Exchange visitors do business with small businesses, airlines, hotels, and non-governmental organizations in local communities, and their presence at our colleges and universities supports academic institutions throughout the country.

The record 1,043,000 international students studying at our colleges and universities during the 2015-16 academic year contributed $32.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supported more than 400,000 jobs across the country, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators. These data do not account for the contributions the thousands of exchange participants that are not students at higher education institutions make to our economy every year.

We respectfully request that you enable the continued success of these vital programs and appropriate Fiscal Year 2017 funding level for Department of State educational and cultural exchange programs in Fiscal Year 2018.

Sincerely,

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator
Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Al Franken  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Robert Menendez  
United States Senator
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator