The Honorable Christopher Coons  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

April 12, 2023

Dear Chairman Coons and Ranking Member Graham:

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. We request that you continue Congress’ long bipartisan support for the State Department’s educational and cultural exchange programs by appropriating $855 million or the highest possible funding level in Fiscal Year 2024.

With Congress’ support, a range of State Department exchange programs connect emerging leaders, entrepreneurs, youth, educators, and athletes from the United States to their counterparts 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 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, including hundreds of world leaders, 123 Pulitzer Prize winners, and 87 Nobel Laureates. According to the State Department, more than 660 current or former heads of government, 75 current or former representatives to the United Nations, 39 current or former heads of international organizations, and 42 current Members of Congress have been on a State Department exchange program. 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);

- 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;

- Engaging and training young professionals through programs such as the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX); and

- Continuing to engage students and scholars through the renowned Fulbright Program.

Finally, State Department exchange programs are a cost-effective investment that provides significant and immediate economic impact in communities across the country. More than 90% of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs budget goes to American organizations, businesses, and individuals. Furthermore, exchange visitors do business with small businesses, airlines, hotels, and non-governmental organizations in local communities, and their presence at our colleges and universities support academic institutions throughout the country.

International students studying at our colleges and universities during the 2021-2022 academic year contributed $33.8 billion to the U.S. economy (up more than $5.5 billion compared to the prior academic year) and supported more than 335,000 jobs across the country, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

We respectfully request that you enable the continued success of these vital programs and appropriate $855 million or the highest possible funding level for Department of State educational and cultural exchange programs in Fiscal Year 2024.

Sincerely,

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator
Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

Peter Welch  
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions and International Economic, Energy and Environmental Policy  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations