



May 1, 2024

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

The Honorable Mario Díaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Graham, Chairman Díaz-Balart, and
Ranking Member Lee,

We write as international exchange program implementing organizations and Department of State (DOS) partners to share our deep concerns over the recent FY2024 funding cuts to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at DOS.

As you know, ECA's diverse suite of international exchange programs allows the U.S. to address critical foreign policy and national security priorities. That is why the Biden Administration's own National Security Strategy reiterates that "our alliances and partnerships around the world are our most important strategic asset and an indispensable element contributing to international peace and stability."

We are therefore very concerned that the nearly 5% cut, or \$36.5 million, to ECA represents a step back in Congress' long-standing commitment to championing and expanding international exchange programs. At a time when conflict is on the rise across the globe, expanding ECA exchange programs that directly support our foreign policy and national security is more critical than ever.

In the final FY24 bill, we are particularly concerned about the significant cuts to the Professional and Cultural Exchange Programs sub-account, which was reduced by an alarming 10%, or \$23 million. The impact of such deep cuts to this sub-account include:

- Fewer participants in the flagship International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), which will celebrate its 85th anniversary next year. Due to rising costs, the program is already on a downward trend, having welcomed 600 fewer participants in 2023 than in

2022. These participants, hand-picked by U.S. Ambassadors at our embassies, are emerging global leaders with whom we need to collaborate on U.S. national security priorities, including international security, global trade and economics, and opposing foreign malign influences.

- Fewer participants in youth and high school exchanges, which provide young Americans the opportunity to build critical language and future career skills through such programs as the National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Abroad Program, the Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) Program, and the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Abroad Program;
- Fewer cultural exchanges, including those focused on sports diplomacy for influential American athletes and those focused on building professional skills, especially in the STEM fields, such as the Professional Fellows Program, TechGirls, and the Youth Tech Camp.

We are also concerned that the smaller, yet still significant, cuts and/or flat funding for the other ECA sub-accounts (Academic Programs, Special Initiatives, Program and Performance, and Exchanges Support) further limit our ability to reach critical audiences and promote U.S. foreign policy interests. In a time of dramatically rising operating costs, even flat funding amounts to a cut for these sub-accounts and reduces the impact of all of ECA's programs to foster relationships between Americans and current and future leaders from around the world, promote international cooperation to tackle shared global challenges, and advance U.S. foreign policy objectives by connecting those who advocate for a free and prosperous world. Such cuts also diminish the significant economic benefits to U.S. communities, as 90% of ECA's budget is spent on American participants and in U.S. communities.

As you work on implementing the FY24 State and Foreign Operations appropriations legislation, and look ahead to FY25, we hope that you will take these concerns into account. Now is not the time to regress on Congress' long-standing commitment to championing and expanding the full suite of ECA's programs. We welcome the opportunity to provide any additional information or answer any questions, and we look forward to working together to ensure the ongoing success and impact of these programs.

Sincerely,



Mark Overmann
Executive Director
Alliance for International Exchange

On behalf of the below 20 organizations:

AFS-USA
AIFS Foundation

American Councils for International Education
Amideast
CRDF Global
Cultural Homestay International (CHI)
Cultural Vistas
EnglishUSA
FHI360
Fulbright Association
Global Ties U.S.
iEARN-USA
Intrax Inc.
IREX
Meridian International Center
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
Stevens Initiative
STS Foundation
UCIEP: University and College Intensive English Programs
World Learning