

BridgeUSA Coalition

May 2, 2024

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee for State,
Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Chris Coons
Chairman
Subcommittee for State,
Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee for State,
Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Subcommittee for State,
Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Chairmen Diaz-Balart and Coons and Ranking Members Lee and Graham:

On behalf of the undersigned 96 international exchange organizations, business associations, and chambers of commerce, we write to express our strong support for the Department of State's BridgeUSA exchange programs (formerly the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program). Specifically, we support including previously enacted appropriation provisions in the FY25 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations package. These provisions reiterate that any regulatory changes made by the executive branch to BridgeUSA exchange programs must be done pursuant to the congressional requirements of formal rulemaking specified in the Administrative Procedure Act.

We also express our support for the Department of State's federally funded exchange programs and ask that the Subcommittee fund educational and cultural exchange programs at \$808.6 million in FY25.

BridgeUSA exchange programs were established by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (the Fulbright-Hays Act) and are administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) within the Department of State. They include such programs as the Au Pair, Camp Counselor, High School, Intern, Summer Work Travel, Teacher, and Trainee categories, among others. These programs provide invaluable cross-cultural experiences for young people from abroad and the Americans they interact with during their programs. They are also vital to the economic, public diplomacy, and foreign policy interests of the United States at virtually no cost to the American taxpayer. BridgeUSA programs expand our international outreach by making an American exchange experience accessible to thousands of international students and young professionals who could not otherwise afford to visit or study in the U.S.

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BridgeUSA is a diverse collection of exchange programs established by Congress. Any executive branch modifications to the programs should follow transparent processes pursuant to rulemaking under the Administrative Procedures Act and congressional oversight. This important provision has been included for the past six years in the State and Foreign Operations Act of the Appropriations bills.¹

We ask that the following proposed language be included in the FY25 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill:

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 (Public Law 87–256; 22 U.S.C. 2451 et seq.), except through the formal rulemaking process pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 551 et seq.) and notwithstanding the exceptions to such rulemaking 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: Provided further, That such consultation shall take place not later than 30 days prior to the publication in the Federal Register of any regulatory action modifying the Exchange Visitor Program.

In an ordinary year, BridgeUSA programs contribute more than \$1.2 billion to the U.S. economy, according to a series of studies by the independent research firm EurekaFacts². The programs support jobs for Americans in nearly every state and in many sectors of the U.S. economy. Specifically, exchange program participants contribute to seasonal businesses and communities by filling job vacancies that would otherwise go unmet. More importantly, the exchange visitors employed by the local businesses in these communities are necessary to keep year-round American workers employed in their jobs. Exchange visitors also provide crucial childcare to more than 20,000 American families – including hundreds of military families and families of medical personnel who would not be able to serve our country and their local communities without the support of these programs.

According to the EurekaFacts studies, Summer Work Travel participants contributed \$5,300 per person to the U.S. economy in 2017, for a total of \$509 million. Au pairs contributed \$5,336 per person per year to the economy, for a total of \$257 million. Additionally, Camp Counselor participants contributed \$59.1 million, and Interns/Trainees contributed \$662.6 million.

¹ FY2018, State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, Division K, Sec. 7034(d)(5), H.R. 1625, p. 548, [Public Law 115-141](#); FY2019, State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, Division F, Sec. 7034(e)(5), H.R. 21, p. 313, [Public Law 116-6](#); and FY2020, State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, Division Sec. 7034(e)(6), H.R. 1865, p. 338, [Public Law 116-94](#).

² Information on the EurekaFacts studies is available at <https://www.alliance-exchange.org/info-and-issues/>.

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Exchange programs broadly advance U.S. national interests in enhancing mutual understanding between the U.S. and people from other countries. For example, according to the EurekaFacts studies, more than 75% of Summer Work Travel exchange visitors returned to their home countries with a more positive opinion of the United States, and 88% of Au Pairs better understood the American values of freedom and independence. 75% of Intern and Trainee participants developed a more positive view of Americans, and 85% of Camp Counselors developed a more positive view of American culture.

Thank you for considering these important requests for FY25 and for your continued leadership on Department of State BridgeUSA exchange programs. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Cory Smith at (202) 361-1442.

Sincerely,

The 96 undersigned organizations, chambers of commerce, and businesses:

BridgeUSA Sponsor Organizations

A Cultural Exchange Service

Agent Au Pair

AIFS

Alliance Abroad Group

American Cultural Exchange LLC dba Go Au Pair

American Exchange Organization - AmerEx

American Journey Cultural Exchange

American Work Adventures

American Work Experience

CampGroup, LLC

CCUSA

Communicating for Agriculture

Communicating for America

Cultural Care Au Pair

Cultural Exchange Network (Cenet)

Cultural Homestay International (CHI)

Cultural Vistas

Dynamic Global Exchange

EF Foundation for Foreign Study

Expert Au Pair

GeoVisions

Global Cultural Exchange (dba HSUSA)

Global Educational Concepts (GEC)

GreatAuPair

Greenheart International

ICCE, Inc.

IIEEX [German American Chamber of Commerce California (GACC CA)]

InterExchange

International Arts & Artists

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International Exchange of North America (IENA)
Intrax Inc.
Life Adventures, Inc.
LifeTRAVELED
NorthWest Student Exchange
Odyssey International Camp
Odyssey International Exchange
Pan Atlantic Exchanges
Pan Atlantic Foundation
PAX Laurasian Exchange
SHRM (The Society for Human Resource Management)
Signature Services Corporation
Spirit Cultural Exchange
STS Foundation
Teachers Council
The Ohio Program
United Studies, Inc.
United Work and Travel

National and State Associations

Alliance for International Exchange
American Camp Association
American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA)
California Attractions and Parks Association
Colorado Ski Country USA
Destination Door County
Florida Attractions Association
FMI - The Food Industry Association
Greater Wildwoods Tourism Improvement & Development Authority
IAAPA
Idaho Ski Areas Association
Michigan Ski Industries Association
Michigan Snowsports Industries Association
Minnesota Ski Areas Association
Montana Ski Areas Association
NEAAPA – The Northeast’s Entertainment Association
NSAA – National Ski Areas Association
New Jersey Business & Industry Association (NJBIA)
New Jersey Amusement Association
New Mexico Ski Areas Association
NJ Restaurant and Hospitality Association (NJRHA)
NJTIA (NJ Tourism Industry Association)
Ocean City MD Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association
Pacific Northwest Ski Areas Association
Pennsylvania Amusement Parks & Attractions
Pool and Hot Tub Alliance

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Ski Areas of New York
Ski California
Ski Maine
Ski New Hampshire
Ski Utah
Ski Wisconsin
U.S. Travel Association
Vermont Ski Areas Association
Virginia Restaurant, Lodging, and Travel Association
White Mountains Attractions Association

National and State Chambers of Commerce

Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau and the
Taney County Partnership
Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce
Cape May County Chamber of Commerce
Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey
Greater Wildwood Chamber of Commerce
Martha's Vineyard Chamber of Commerce
Myrtle Beach Area Chamber and Visit Myrtle Beach
New Jersey Chamber of Commerce
Provincetown Chamber of Commerce, Inc.
Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce
Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Whitefish Chamber of Commerce

cc: Members of the House Subcommittee for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
cc: Members of the Senate Subcommittee for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs