February 25, 2022

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

On behalf of the American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB), a professional society of nearly 7,000 basic biomedical researchers in all 50 states and 65 nations around the world, I am writing to lend our strong support for S.3638, the Keep STEM Talent Act of 2022.

S.3638 will play an important role in making sure America continues as the world leader in science. All too often, international students, trained at U.S. institutions and often at federal government expense, return to their home countries to, essentially, compete with the scientific community that trained them. The United States should be encouraging these young scientists to remain here and join the American scientific workforce. S.3638 significantly resolves this problem by reducing the barriers to permanent resident status for international students who have completed advanced STEM degrees from U.S. educational institutions and are interested in continuing their career in American science.

International students come here to attend some of the best research institutions in the world and train with internationally known researchers. After finishing their training, many decide to remain in the United States, which helps maintain the leadership standing of American science. In fact, 2021 statistics from the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) indicate that for the last decade, “One half of noncitizens at graduation had definite plans to stay in the United States, either continuing employment or accepting an offer of a postdoc or other employment in the United States.”

As the quality of research in other nations improves, collaborations between U.S. scientists and researchers in other countries continue to grow. Between 1996 and 2020, NCSES reports show the number of research papers published by American scientists with international coauthors has
quadrupled. In 1996, the United Kingdom was the home nation of a majority of coauthors of American papers. In 2020, China held that position, with coauthorships growing sevenfold from 1996. Indian coauthorships almost doubled during the same time period, while coauthorships with Japanese colleagues were reduced by half, and joint papers with British scientists remained stagnant.

In the scientific community, collaborations are an essential part of research. The increasing number of international coauthors of American scientific papers is also an indication of the growing quality of international scientific research communities. These statistics also show that America’s role as the world leader in science is no longer as guaranteed as it once was. The United States is going to have to work to maintain its leadership position.

In 2017, the ASCB published a white paper, “ASCB Calls to Modernize the U.S. Immigration System for Science.” One of the recommendations of the white paper was that “those international students who receive a doctorate in a scientific discipline, including biomedical research, from a U.S. teaching institution should have the option of remaining in the United States with a green card.” S.3638 will fulfill the ASCB recommendation and also help the United States maintain its leadership position.

The growing quality of science around the world brings more international competition and more choices for foreign-born, U.S.-trained scientific talent. Statistics say these skilled young scientists want to stay in the United States. We must do all we can to be a welcoming nation and make it easy for them to stay so they can strengthen U.S. science instead of returning to their countries of origin to build the competition.

The ASCB welcomes the opportunity to work with you on this and other important issues. Please contact Kevin M. Wilson, ASCB’s Director of Public Policy and Media Relations at kwilson@ascb.org.

Sincerely,

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