March 2, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President –

As president 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 you today to strongly urge you to provide important visa protections for STEM trainees from Ukraine currently studying in the United States.

The recent unprovoked invasion by the Russian military and the resulting refugee crisis in Ukraine makes a safe return to Ukraine from the United States now or in the immediate future untenable. In 2019, the last year of accurate statistics, just over 3,000 Ukrainians were in the United States on J-1, F-1, H-1B, and O-1 visas, the visas typically used by international STEM scientists studying here in the United States.

The ASCB asks that the United States provide special immigration protections to these scientists. We are aware of three particular programs that could be used to provide protection for Ukrainian students and scientists in the United States. They are the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program, a temporary visa status, which allows citizens of a particular country to remain in the United States as long as it is unsafe for them to return to their home nation; the Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) program, which protects visa holders from deportation; and the Special Student Relief (SSR) program, which can be granted to students with F-1 visas facing “emergent circumstances” including wars and military conflicts at home. Not only would these programs offer safety to the visa holders but I am sure it would provide important comfort to their families in Ukraine.

Alternatively, we ask that special protections for Ukrainians in the United States be included in the emergency aid legislation currently being
considered by Congress.

While each day’s news is filled with stories of great acts of heroism by young Ukrainians standing up to fight for their country, we should not force Ukrainian students to leave the United States and go back to Ukraine or enter the ranks of refugees seeking protection in neighboring countries simply because their U.S. visas have expired.

As always, we would be pleased to help on this or any other issue important to our members. Please contact Kevin Wilson, ASCB’s Director of Public Policy and Media Relations at kwilson@ascb.org.

Sincerely,

Martin Chalfie, PhD
President, The American Society for Cell Biology
2008 Nobel Prize in Chemistry