

LAMAR ALEXANDER, TENNESSEE, CHAIRMAN

MICHAEL B. ENZI, WYOMING  
RICHARD BURR, NORTH CAROLINA  
JOHNNY ISAKSON, GEORGIA  
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY  
SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE  
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA  
MARK KIRK, ILLINOIS  
TIM SCOTT, SOUTH CAROLINA  
ORRIN HATCH, UTAH  
PAT ROBERTS, KANSAS  
BILL CASSIDY, M.D., LOUISIANA

PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON  
BARBARA A. MIKULSKI, MARYLAND  
BERNARD SANDERS (I), VERMONT  
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., PENNSYLVANIA  
AL FRANKEN, MINNESOTA  
MICHAEL F. BENNET, COLORADO  
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND  
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN  
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT  
ELIZABETH WARREN, MASSACHUSETTS

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

DAVID P. CLEARY, STAFF DIRECTOR  
EVAN SCHATZ, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

<http://help.senate.gov>

February 2, 2017

Ms. Betsy DeVos  
Secretary-Designate, U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Ms. DeVos,

President Trump's Executive Order signed on January 27, 2017, titled "*Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States*," halts immigration and refugee resettlement to the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries. This action to ban Muslims from entering the United States is against our American values and has broad consequences for our nation's students—from our youngest learners to those in higher education. It is also doing great harm to faculty, staff, and researchers at schools, colleges, and universities across the country and around the world. While other federal agencies are responsible for implementing the President's actions, as the nominee for the important position of Secretary of Education, I would like to know if you support this Executive Order.

This Executive Order sets forth xenophobic, intolerant, and prejudiced policies that are already wreaking havoc throughout our education system. Educators, children, and families around the country are trying to grapple with the effects of this Executive Order on their communities. Thousands of children of immigrants have been traumatized by the President's announcement. These students worry about being able to visit their relatives and their safety in and around school. In addition, visas awarded to international students enrolled in United States colleges and universities from these seven Muslim-majority countries have been canceled, without warning and without notice. This has left many international students stranded outside of the United States uncertain about whether they will be allowed to return to their studies in the United States. For example, one student, the elected president of her college's graduate student association, was denied entry at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport after simply going overseas for a routine renewal of her visa, which is required under the law.

Many thousands of students from Muslim-majority countries have been told to cancel any planned overseas travel, and students from other countries have been advised to return to the United States immediately, at great personal expense. Nearly 50 higher education associations representing the vast majority of colleges and universities in the United States are publicly opposing the ban, including the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, which represents both the University of Washington and Washington State University.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Institute for International Education, more than 17,000 students from the seven Muslim-majority countries targeted by the Muslim ban studied at American universities last year.<sup>ii</sup> These are students our country should be continuing to welcome into our institutions of higher education to contribute to the rich diversity of America, which is a defining element of our culture, history, and values. Instead, this ban is inciting fear in a generation of young students who only want to better their lives and their communities by studying at American colleges and universities.

A healthy support system surrounding each college student is essential for a student's success, and that includes a student's family. Yet, this ban on Muslim immigrants and refugees will prevent many international students from returning home to see their families in the case of emergency, family illness, or for breaks between terms. As students from Muslim-majority countries—including students from countries that are not currently targeted by this Muslim ban—look to study in the United States, Europe, or elsewhere in the world, this Executive Order will prevent our nation's universities from attracting the best and brightest to study and research, which is vital for the economic development that results from innovation and scientific breakthroughs at our nation's higher education institutions. These would-be students and scholars could have been on their way to curing cancer or helping to solve our climate crisis, but are now riddled with fear of persecution. The ban may also severely damage our relationships in Middle Eastern countries, which are home to foreign branch campuses of several American colleges and universities. Noted scholars and faculty from Muslim-majority countries—including those countries that are not currently targeted by this ban on Muslim immigrants and refugees—are questioning whether they are welcome in the United States.

Given the role that you are nominated to play on behalf of these students, faculty, and staff, do you support this Executive Order? I look forward to hearing from you on this issue before the cloture vote on your nomination on the Senate floor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Murray  
United States Senator

---

<sup>i</sup> American Council on Education & 46 Higher Education Associations. "Letter to Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly on Maintaining the United States as the Destination of Choice for the World's Best Students, Faculty and Scholars." January 31, 2017. <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Letter-to-Secretary-of-Homeland-Security-John-Kelly-on-Maintaining-the-US-as-the-Destination-of-Choice-for-Students.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> Institute for International Education. 2016 Open Doors Report Data: All Places of Origin, 2015-16 Academic Year. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/All-Places-of-Origin/2014-16>. Accessed January 30, 2017.