

August 8, 2017

The Honorable Ben W. Tilmon
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tilmon:

We write in support of the Department of State's 2+1 Visa Summer Work Travel (SWT) program. This public diplomacy program has a long track record of success, providing an enriching exchange experience to a diverse pool of college and university students from across the globe, including those countries key to U.S. national security interests. It does so at no expense to the American taxpayer.

As you know, the SWT program attracts visa to international students who wish to travel to the United States during their schools' summer breaks. The program affords these students the opportunity to experience the American way of life, American business culture, work alongside Americans, and improve their English-language skills. Through the built-in work component that places them in temporary, seasonal jobs, they can delay their living and travel expenses.

The SWT program also plays an important role for local communities across the United States. Many small businesses in our states are dependent on the program to meet their seasonal labor needs. According to a recent study commissioned by the Alliance for International Exchange, one quarter of surveyed employers state that they could not operate at capacity during peak season without SWT students to supplement their seasonal work force.¹ For these businesses, an inability to staff all of their positions, in turn, would result in fewer hours, lower salaries, less benefits, and even job losses for their American employees. It is important to note that SWT program regulations contain provisions to ensure that exchange visitors do not displace American workers.

SWT exchange students not only work in our local businesses, they also sleep in our homes, eat in our restaurants, and use local accommodations. Their absence would have a real-world impact on local businesses throughout the country.

For these reasons, as the Administration reviews all U.S. visa programs, we urge you to work with stakeholders in the SWT community to continue to strengthen this important and successful cultural exchange program that enriches and supports communities across the United States.

¹ *Large Ratings, et al., Review of Summer Work Travel Program: Program Effect and Economic Impact, Dec. 15, 2011-2016* (June 15, 2017), <http://www.aie.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/06/15-2017-SWT-Review-Executive-Summary-Final.pdf>.