

THE NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL

April 30, 2015

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Immigration Innovation Act of 2015, S.153

Dear Senator Shaheen,

The application process for H-1B visas opened at the beginning of this month and, as has been the case in recent years, the cap was reached within days. The New England economy is burdened, to a greater extent than other regions, by the cap placed on skilled worker visas. As you know, our region is home to some of the top universities and research programs in the world, which attract thousands of foreign students each year. At the same time, New England is home to a thriving innovation economy which is dependent on highly skilled workers in the STEM fields, yet these employers struggle to find American workers with the skills and training necessary to fill open positions. The oft-discussed “skills gap” is a significant problem in our region and one that demands action to ensure continued economic growth.

As Congress considers various measures to fix our nation’s broken immigration system, The New England Council joins the New England Congressional delegation in taking particular interest in the effects these proposals will have on the health of the region and its economic prosperity. However we believe immigration reform presents Congress with an opportunity to take action to address the skills gap that our region faces. The New England Council, the nation’s oldest regional business association, has long supported increasing the cap on H-1B visas to address this immediate crisis, and also believes that we must expand STEM education in America so that the nation can continue to meet the demand for highly skilled workers into the future.

The New England Council has endorsed the bipartisan Immigration Innovation Act of 2015 and strongly encourages the members of the New England Senate delegation to stand in support of this measure. The Immigration Innovation Act (“I-Squared”) would address the STEM skills gap with both a short-term and a long-term solution. In the short term, this bill would increase the cap on H-1B visas to allow more foreign-born STEM workers remain in the US and fill open jobs in high-tech fields. However the legislation also provides a long-term solution to the skill gap by allocating a portion of the fees collected from H-1B visas to investing in STEM education at the state level in order to build a domestic pipeline of highly-skilled STEM workers for the future.

We were pleased that measures similar to those in the Immigration Innovation Act were included in the comprehensive immigration reform bill passed by the Senate in 2013, and thank you for your support of that legislation. We believe that this commonsense approach to closing the skills gap could reap tremendous benefits in New England and across the country. We hope that Congressional leaders are able to advance these initiatives as they are vital to our economy, and we hope that you will support the Immigration

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Innovation Act or similar measures to address the skills gap as part of comprehensive reform. Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership to promote economic growth in New England. Please do not hesitate to contact us if the Council may be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Emily J. Heisig
Senior Vice President of Federal Affairs
The New England Council

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