The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the nearly 7,000 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). We strongly support policies that strengthen American economic competitiveness and encourage highly skilled workers to live and work in the US.

There are over 200,000 international STEM graduate students enrolled in American institutions. PhD students in particular form the backbone of our technological establishment and roughly 6 in 10 PhD students in engineering, mathematics, and computing come from other countries. Yet despite investing over $300,000 in each student’s education, PhD graduates who aspire to live and work in America face a long and complex path to permanent residency. Most students attempt to use the H1-B program as a bridge between OPT and permanent residency, with only 10% of STEM PhD graduates succeeding in obtaining employment-based permanent residency. Furthermore, since only large and established firms can provide significant immigration counsel for their workers, this bureaucratic complexity effectively subsidizes Big Tech and large corporations at the expense of small businesses.

We urge Congress to create a streamlined path to permanent residency for US-educated STEM graduate students. While we support the recently reintroduced EAGLE Act (H.R.3648, 117th), which will reduce the visa backlog for the worst affected students, the best way to ensure that our talented students remain here and contribute to our country is to exempt US-educated STEM PhDs from numerical immigration limitations. This issue has a history of bipartisan support (e.g. H.R 2717 115th, S.744 113th) and would greatly benefit the entire nation.

If you would like to know more about the importance of international students to our nation’s scientific progress and global competitiveness, or would like to discuss additional methods of advancing graduate education and research, please reach out to us at gsc-eab-fed@mit.edu.

Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council. July 2021.