The Keep Innovators in America Act (H.R. 8013)

Ask: We urge members of Congress to cosponsor and pass the Keep Innovators in America Act to attract and retain the global talent needed to complement our domestic workforce and maintain U.S. preeminence in research and innovation.

While America is fortunate to have a large and dynamic workforce, **we do not yet produce enough graduates to meet the demands of the 21st-century knowledge economy.** By providing international students and recent graduates with hands-on training for up to 36 months, OPT helps fill critical gaps in the U.S. workforce, especially in STEM and research fields. For decades, it has served as a vital tool for attracting and retaining international students while sparking innovation in America's workplaces.

The current administration is now threatening to restrict or end OPT, putting **America's reputation as the top destination for international talent and its global dominance in research and innovation at serious risk**. A majority of the 8,000 international students surveyed by IDP Education in August 2025 said post-study work opportunities strongly influence their choice of study destination; 66 percent said they would go elsewhere or consider going elsewhere if those opportunities were not available.

The bipartisan Keep Innovators in America Act (H.R. 8013) **codifies Optional Practical Training, enabling international students to maintain student status** while ensuring that small businesses, startups, and research institutions have the talent they need to grow and innovate. The bill directs the Department of Homeland Security Secretary to set the terms and conditions for OPT and requires that it be related to their field of study. International students with pending or approved green cards may also maintain student status.

The Keep Innovators in America Act is good for U.S. workers, their wages, and the economy.

- A 2023 analysis by the Niskanen Center, "Foreign Students in STEM Don't Hurt American Workers," found that increased participation in OPT led to **increased innovation and did not depress average earnings for U.S. workers.**
- The 2019 study by the National Foundation for American Policy found **no evidence that OPT participation reduces job opportunities for U.S. workers**.
- "The Economic Impact of Curbing the Optional Practical Training Program" report by the Business Roundtable in 2018 showed **significant negative effects on the U.S. economy if OPT were scaled back or curtailed, including U.S. job losses.**
- International students and their families contributed **$42.9 billion dollars and 355,736 jobs** to the U.S. economy during the 2024-2025 academic year. (nafsa.org/econvalue).

Our nation thrives on the contributions of both foreign and domestic talent. Eliminating or curtailing OPT would diminish the appeal of a U.S. higher education, harm our national and economic security, and deprive U.S. students, institutions, and communities of the diverse and enriching contributions international students bring to our campuses.

NAFSA Contact:
Heather Stewart, Counsel and Director, Immigration Policy
heather.stewart@nafsa.org