

ASBMB statement on President Donald J. Trump's executive order restricting immigration

In response to an executive order on immigration issued by President Donald J. Trump on Friday, the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology released the following statement:

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, an organization representing more than 11,000 biomedical researchers, educators and students, is concerned about the potential impact on the nation's biomedical enterprise resulting from President Donald Trump's executive order restricting immigration from seven Muslim-majority nations.

The ASBMB is an international organization. Some of its members who study or conduct research in the U.S. hail from other nations. Some run dual labs in the U.S. and overseas. About 20 percent of its members live and work abroad.

Indeed, biomedical laboratories of all sizes across the United States are run and propelled by foreign scientists who were recruited here for their expertise and talent. In 2008, nearly 60 percent of life-science postdoctoral researchers were temporary residents of the U.S. The National Science Foundation reports that the life sciences had the highest employment growth among immigrant scientists and engineers between 2003 and 2013.

Most of the ASBMB's members travel internationally on a routine basis to present their groundbreaking discoveries to scientific audiences and to forge collaborations with colleagues who have necessary expertise and equipment.

The ASBMB, like most nonprofit scientific societies, also draws upon the expertise of researchers abroad to provide peer review for its three highly respected scientific journals. Those experts convene in the U.S. regularly to ensure that the journals are adhering to the strictest standards of scientific integrity and replication.

Furthermore, each year the ASBMB hosts scientific meetings in the U.S., where international researchers showcase their science in front of American audiences. It also hosts training seminars and workshops.

In sum, the work of the society cannot be done if its members cannot travel freely or do not feel comfortable doing so.

We also recognize that travel bans affect our members, their students and their collaborators on a personal level. Principal investigators, lab managers, technicians and students cannot do their best

work if they're preoccupied with the fear of their relatives and friends being detained while trying to come visit for holidays, special occasions, births and funerals.

We ask that ASBMB members whose labs are affected by the travel restrictions contact us at publicaffairs@asbmb.org.

The ASBMB celebrates the diversity of its membership and strives to make its programming and events inclusive. In fact, in November, we released a statement reiterating our commitment to diversity and inclusion. We also wrote at length about the value of immigrants to the biomedical enterprise and about the negative impacts that anti-globalization and anti-immigrant rhetoric could have on American institutions.

Academics across the nation have raised concerns similar to those outlined here. In fact, one group of academics is circulating a petition that has been signed by thousands of students and professors, including dozens of Nobel laureates.

The petition says, in part:

"This Executive Order is detrimental to the national interests of the United States. The EO significantly damages American leadership in higher education and research. US research institutes host a significant number of researchers from the nations subjected to the upcoming restrictions. From Iran alone, more than 3000 students have received PhDs from American universities in the past 3 years. The proposed EO limits collaborations with researchers from these nations by restricting entry of these researchers to the US and can potentially lead to departure of many talented individuals who are current and future researchers and entrepreneurs in the US. We strongly believe the immediate and long term consequences of this EO do not serve our national interests."

The ASBMB encourages its members to read the petition and sign it if they agree with its sentiments.

Finally, the ASBMB is a membership-led organization. Its president is Natalie Ahn, professor of distinction at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Ahn had this to say: "Scientific research and discovery in our country is truly an international enterprise. This is true of laboratories in every sector — from private industry and start-ups to government and university. All Americans benefit from tremendous advances in technology and medicine, and the greatest advances that we enjoy have always been fueled by the deep knowledge and hard work of scientists from around the world who conduct their research in the United States."