

The Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
House of Commons
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The Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health
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Re: Utilizing existing university residence isolation programs as a federally approved alternative to mandatory hotel stays for arriving international students

Dear Minister Mendicino and Minister Hajdu,

We are writing to you on behalf of graduate students across Canada regarding the recently implemented international travel quarantine requirements. We appreciate and understand the difficult work you and your colleagues have undertaken to protect the lives of people in Canada, and we support your ongoing efforts to this end. Our student organizations and respective universities have fully cooperated with public health measures, supporting those impacted, and implementing and monitoring institutional isolation programs for incoming international students.

To this end, we write to you to request that you consider utilizing existent university isolation programs as a federally approved isolation plan instead of mandating international students to a 3-day hotel stay, which will be unaffordable for many of these students.

Our concerns with the current quarantine program relate to affordability for international graduate students, the inequity of the proposed program, and importantly the demonstrated efficacy of our institutional isolation programs. Graduate students tend to be financially independent individuals, often with dependents, who come from a variety of economic contexts; in short, they do not fit the mold of the “international student from a wealthy background.” For many thesis-based students, their recruitment is based on demonstrated merit, selected by a supervising professor regardless of financial standing to do research and contribute to Canada’s research and innovation strength. This is further complicated by the patch-work funding environment graduate students find themselves in, and where minimum funding arrangements exist, they are nearly universally too low to accommodate the \$2000 price tag of the new federal isolation requirements. Additionally, international students often do not have a Canadian bank account upon arrival and have limited means of paying for hotel rooms as a result. However, with the assistance of approved university quarantine plans, international students are able to have a relatively stress-free move without undue concern about the financial impacts. The hotel quarantine system in place now is a barrier to accommodation and accessibility, even if some students may have the means to pay for it.

While we are concerned about the wellbeing of and opportunity cost to our constituents, it is worth noting the isolation requirements may have further consequences. Universities coast-to-coast saw a drop in their

international student enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on global travel, and this trend is likely to continue until global vaccination efforts have fully matured. The additional hurdle of a relatively expensive isolation program risks accelerating this decline, both among incoming and returning international graduate students. International graduate students are a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce that support and drive Canada's research and innovation sector. Given the federal government's 2021-2023 Immigration Level Plans to support economic recovery through immigration, removing arduous and inaccessible quarantine requirements can help attract these highly skilled individuals and mitigate the impacts of an already troubled international student recruitment system. The impact on retention, attraction, and therefore the impact on myriad academic and educational pursuits at our universities, is foreseeable.

As previously mentioned, we agree measures need to be taken to circumvent the risk of international travel, particularly now with the threat posed by COVID-19 variants of concern. Thankfully, many U15 universities have federally approved isolation packages that have been successful in their stated goal of outbreak prevention. **Therefore, our ask is to provide an exception to international students attending an institution with a federally approved isolation program from the mandatory 3-day hotel stay and to approve university residence isolation plans as an affordable and equitable alternative to the mandatory hotel stay.** Many of us have advocated to our institutional administrations in support of this ask; you may hear from them as well.

We appreciate you taking the time to read our concerns and proposal, and we hope you consider utilizing the aforementioned institutional isolation packages in lieu of the hotel-based approach for international graduate students. It is everyone's goal to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for the benefit of all, and we want to ensure that the burden does not fall upon those who cannot bear it, when alternatives exist.

Sincerely,

The Graduate Student Societies & Associations of Canada

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