

Pittsburgh schools, lawyers discourage travel for those affected by Trump order

Universities across the Pittsburgh region are cautioning their international students in the wake of President Trump's executive order barring U.S. travel for nationals from seven countries, and one Pittsburgh lawyer predicts more wide-ranging changes to things like work authorization under the Trump administration.

The number of students impacted in the Pittsburgh region is relatively small – the University of Pittsburgh has 61 students from one of the affected countries, Carnegie Mellon University has 50, and Duquesne University has five and a visiting scholar. The majority are from Iran, which has 54 students at Pitt and 33 at CMU.

All three schools and several others in the region are advising all of their international students to check all of their supporting documentation before they leave the country for any length of time, and for students from the countries affected by the order to stay in the U.S. until further notice.

"Along with others across the country in the academic and higher education communities, and those committed to advancing social justice worldwide, we express deep concern regarding this executive order," Duquesne University president Ken Gormley wrote in a letter to students. "As a Catholic, Spiritan institution with a long history of supporting the needs of the underserved including refugees and immigrants – not just in Pittsburgh but within our global – we support a reasonable approach to immigration that is not based upon fear or hate, does not discriminate and does not cause harm to individuals, families or employers."

Joel Pfeffer, a partner with Meyer, Unkovic & Scott who specializes in immigration and nationality law, offers the same advice, and said that while parts of the executive order are already facing court challenges, any part of it that does not contradict existing statute or regulation will likely stand, including a limit on how many refugees will be allowed to enter the U.S. this year that is less than half of what the country accepted last year.

"I expect that eventually there will be some new regulations proposed or announced, and put out for public comment, that govern the opportunities for these foreign students to work," he



Joel Pfeffer, a partner with Meyer, Unkovic & Scott.

said. "You can't do that with an executive order, because these opportunities are governed by regulation, and there is a required comment period before they can be changed."

The executive order, signed by Trump last week, severely limits immigration for seven predominantly Muslim countries – Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Sudan – and has placed a 120-day refugee ban on six of them, while barring Syrian refugees indefinitely.

International students are admitted to the country for the duration of their studies, Pfeffer said, so any students currently in the U.S., even if they're from one of the affected countries, will not face issues as long as they remain in the country. But those who were abroad when Trump signed the order, even green card holders, faced a difficult re-entry, as many were detained or turned away while trying to return to the U.S.

"These closed-border people seem to have the president's ear," Pfeffer said. "There are people who are permanent residents of the U.S., dual nationals, who have had trouble returning because they're from one of these countries. We have to wait until the dust settles and the Department of Homeland Security has announced clear and unambiguous guidelines on how this will be

implemented before we can advise anyone from these seven countries to travel."

Pfeffer noted that some aspects of the order also require Congressional approval for funding, which will delay their implementation, and the lack of warning prior to enacting the order has only served to create confusion.

"This is unprecedented. It's a sea change in the way the Department of Homeland Security operates that is unprecedented," Pfeffer said. "The agencies were caught off guard, on a weekend, on how to implement these changes. I'm not being critical; I'm only saying that the agencies had no warning, and there appears to have been no advanced preparation on how to implement these changes."

Those from the affected countries who are working in the U.S. are similarly impacted by the order, which bans those citizens from entering the U.S. regardless of visa category. Representatives for Highmark Health, the region's second-largest employer, said it was actively follow the order and how it might impact existing and future employees. UPMC, the region's largest employer, declined to comment.

"We continue to monitor the current immigration situation carefully as to the potential impact to our employees or students and their families who are from one of the countries identified in the order's temporary travel restrictions, including those with valid green cards or H-1B visas," said Lynn Seay, director of corporate communications for Highmark Health. "For employees who are currently affected by this executive order, or who may be in the future, we are working to further clarify the details and assistance, including legal, needed to help mitigate the barriers affecting their travels to and from the United States."

On Monday, Pennsylvania's attorney general, Josh Shapiro, joined 16 other state attorneys general in condemning Trump's travel ban, all of them issuing a statement that said, in part, that they "will use all of the tools of our offices to fight this unconstitutional order and preserve our nation's national security and core values."

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