Dear Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

I write as your constituent to express my concern regarding Confucius Institutes. These Chinese government-funded centers operate at more than 80 American college campuses to support the Chinese government’s overseas propaganda. Some 500 Confucius Classrooms also operate at American K-12 schools.[[1]](#footnote-1)

These Confucius Institutes and Classrooms threaten the integrity of the American educational system, serve the interests of a foreign authoritarian government, and compromise American national security. I urge you to investigate Confucius Institutes and Classrooms and to urge American schools to close these programs.

In 2017, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) concluded in a report, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, that “to a large extent, universities have made improper concessions that jeopardize academic freedom and institutional autonomy.”[[2]](#footnote-2) NAS found that Confucius Institutes are operated by a Chinese government agency, the Hanban, whose governing body includes officials from the State Press and Publications Department Administration (which handles propaganda).

NAS also found that the Hanban provides textbooks and selects and pays the Confucius Institute teachers, who are Chinese nationals trained to present the Chinese government in a positive light. One Confucius Institute director said if pressed to answer a question about Tiananmen Square, where in 1989 the Chinese government massacred democracy demonstrators, she would “show a picture and point out the beautiful architecture.”

Recently the federal government has taken increasing notice of Confucius Institutes. In February, FBI Director Christopher Wray acknowledged that his agency is taking “investigative steps” at Confucius Institutes that may be engaged in espionage.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In 2018 the National Defense Authorization Act barred the Department of Defense from funding Chinese language programs at universities with Confucius Institutes.

In 2019, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations [released a report](https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China%27s%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf) criticizing Confucius Institutes as “part of China’s broader, long-term strategy” to develop “soft power” that “encourages complacency” in the face of China’s increasingly illiberal policies.  It describes Confucius Institutes as an “attempt to export China’s censorship of political debate and prevent discussion of potentially politically sensitive topics.” It concludes that “Absent full transparency regarding how Confucius Institutes operate and full reciprocity for U.S. cultural outreach efforts on college campuses in China, Confucius Institutes should not continue in the United States.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

But there is more that should be done.

**First, require financial transparency.** The Department of Education has begun to enforce existing federal transparency law, but that law needs to be updated and its loopholes must be closed. Amend 20 U.S.C. § 1011f. to lower the disclosure threshold from $250,000 to $50,000; to require disclosure of the names of foreign donors or agencies; to require disclosure of gifts from registered foreign agents; to specify that in-kind gifts count toward the threshold; and to require that colleges disclose the purpose of the gift and any requirements attached by the donor.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Second, protect American research and intellectual property.** Make institutions with Confucius Institutes ineligible for federal research funding and ineligible for Chinese language and area studies grants under Title VI of the Higher Education Act—as well as ineligible for any bailout funding in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Third, require Confucius Institutes to register as Foreign Agents.** The Foreign Agents Registration Act exempts “bona fide” academic organizations. Clarify that foreign propaganda shrouded in an educational institute is not exempt.

**Fourth, enforce antidiscrimination law.** Confucius Institutes regularly engage in discriminatory hiring practices. The American university typically agrees to hire Confucius Institute staff from a pool of candidates vetted and selected by the Chinese government, which routinely discriminates by politics and religion. Ask the Justice Department to investigate.

**Fifth, hold more hearings.** Confucius Institutes threaten national security, as FBI Director Wray acknowledged. They gag American scholars. They are a tool for China to monitor, intimidate, and harass Chinese students studying in the United States.

Confucius Institutes are an affront to intellectual freedom, national security, and American interests. It is time for them to close, and it is time for the U.S. to act.

Respectfully,

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1. “How Many Confucius Institutes Are in the United States?” National Association of Scholars, regularly updated. <https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/how_many_confucius_institutes_are_in_the_united_states> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, National Association of Scholars, April 2017. <https://www.nas.org/reports/outsourced-to-china> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Rubio Raises Concerns About the Growing Threat Posed by China,” Marco Rubio, February 13, 2018. <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=F998DBAA-6C2B-4BA0-891C-7647BDEAD31F> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *China’s Impact on the U.S. Educational System,* U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, February 2019. [https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf](https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China%27s%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rachelle Peterson, “U.S. Universities' Dangerous Lack of Foreign Gift Transparency,” *Real Clear Education,* July 12, 2019. <https://www.realcleareducation.com/articles/2019/07/12/us_universities_dangerous_lack_of_foreign_gift_transparency.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)