

Talking points – On the Value and Necessity of J-1 Visas for Camps

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE NEEDED

- Camps that participate in the U.S. State Department’s J-1 Visa Camp Counselor and Summer Work Travel (SWT) camp cultural exchange programs do so because there is a shortage of available seasonal workers in their areas with specific availability and skills. Many camps are located in remote and rural areas with low unemployment. Camps must compete with local businesses, internships, and summer educational programs in order to find staff willing to work during the short camp season. There are not enough American students and workers to fill camp jobs.
- There are more than 23,000 international students that participate in the J-1 Visa Camp Counselor program. Another 5,000 international college students participate within the J-1 Visa Summer Work Travel (SWT) program at summer camps. Students from both J-1 Visa programs are placed in all 50 states throughout the U.S. According to a 2016 American Camp Association survey of its members, two out of three of 3 (66%) overnight camps hire international students, and 10.9% of their staff are international cultural exchange participants. For independent for-profit camps, 19.7% of their staff are international cultural exchange participants.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

- The elimination of the J-1 Camp Counselor and J-1 SWT in Camps would devastate summer camps, resulting in possible camp closures and reductions in the capacity of hundreds of camps to serve children and youth. This would result in the loss of thousands of American jobs as camps are forced to downsize, and would have tremendous impacts on many local economies.
- A 2017 study of the economic contribution of Youth Camping in just the nine state area of northeastern United States revealed that over 6,000 state licensed camps have a direct economic contribution of nearly \$3.2 billion and pay over \$1.1 billion in local, state and federal income taxes. As these expenditures multiply through the northeast regional economy, additional spending by downstream businesses and employees occurs, resulting in a total economic contribution of \$8 billion in sales, over \$3 billion in wages and \$500 million in state and local taxes that are associated with youth camps. This study amplifies the tremendous economic contribution that youth camps make throughout our nation.

TRADITIONAL – CULTURAL EXCHANGES

- Camp Counselor and camp-specific Summer Work Travel International cultural exchange programs like these make up the core component of our people-to-people diplomacy and are essential to our national security. International participants live and work daily with American staff and campers sharing culture and language, exploring ideas and discovering both similarities and differences about each other in a positive setting. These steps in understanding are a vital addition to the youth development process of our American youth as well as to the exchange visitor traveling back to their home country.
- The greatest economic impact of youth camps may be their contribution to the development of human capital. A wealth of research suggests that youth camps improve developmental and academic outcomes, promotes wellness and provides valuable employment experiences.

NEXT STEPS: If the Trump Administration proposes the elimination of J-1 Visa programs (Camp Counselor and SWT), ACA, its partners and ACA members will need to work with Members of Congress and other allies to fight against these cuts. ACA will also attempt to convince the White House to reverse its expected actions on the Camp Counselor and SWT programs. ACA will coordinate messaging and outreach and lead a national effort to: 1) showcase the need for these international students and; 2) demonstrate the devastating economic impact of eliminating the Camp Counselor and Summer Work Travel programs.