Subject: ICEB-2019-0006

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed rule establishing a fixed time period of admission and an extension of stay procedure for nonimmigrant academic students. This comment is submitted on behalf of SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics, representing scientists, industry and students in the area of optics and photonics from around the world.

SPIE is greatly concerned that the proposed rule change would discourage the best and brightest from around the world from choosing to pursue their studies in the U.S. This would not only have a negative impact on American universities, but it would also inhibit what is often the start on a pathway for these scientists to stay and contribute to the innovation ecosystem in the United States.

Surveys show it takes international students on average 4.5 years to finish a degree. Instituting such a strict time-period may limit the ability of international students to change their majors, explore academic programs outside their majors, or extend their studies. In addition, the proposed time frame could discourage international students looking to pursue a M.S. or for those pursuing PhDs, which take on average 6 to 8 years to complete. As the United States looks forward to building the workforce of the future, a healthy pipeline of skilled scientists will be vital if the U.S. is to lead in areas such as quantum, AI and advanced communications. Making changes that discourage migration of international scientists to the US at this time does not make sense when looking at the long-term goals of advancement in key areas of science and technology.

Additionally, there are major concerns with the new Extension of Status (EOS) process and implementation for both students and institutions of higher education. Students seeking post-completion OPT would have to apply for an EOS as well as employment authorization. According to the proposed rule, these would be separate processes and a student may not engage in post-completion OPT unless the work authorization is granted, even if the EOS was granted. Though we recognize the necessity to track and verify the status of NIV, we believe the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), already in place for these visa categories, is sufficient.

In conclusion, we urge that the proposed rule be withdrawn in its entirety, and that admission for the duration of status remain in effect.