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# UMass, Framingham State, QCC presidents condemn ICE order as Harvard, MIT sue

[By Monica Busch](#)

Several area college presidents, including Marty Meehan of UMass, Javier Cevallos of Framingham State and Luis Pedraja of Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester fiercely condemned this week a new Immigration and Customs Enforcement policy that would require non-immigrant international students to leave the country if their fall semester classes transition entirely online. The new policy was announced Monday.

“In short, the ICE guidance is cruel to valued members of our community while being counter-productive and destructive to one of the most important institutions we have: American higher education,” Meehan said in a lengthy statement.

Pedraja, in turn, whose school plans to operate almost entirely remotely in the fall, condemned the new policy as a violation of QCC students' human rights.

"Our international students should not be subjected to such blatant discrimination," Pedraja said. "The decision of colleges and universities to

continue with remote instruction this fall is for the health and safety of all students; not a chosen few."

"No one," Pedraja continued, "should have to choose between pursuing an education or deportation."

Under the July 6 ICE policy announcement, non-immigrant F-1 and M-1 students attending schools operating entirely online may not remain in the United States, even if they are taking a full course load. The U.S. Department of State would not issue visas to students enrolled in fully-online programs for the fall semester and Customs and Border Protection would not allow those students to enter the country, according to a press release published by ICE.

In turn, schools using a hybrid model of online and in-person learning — which the majority who have announced fall plans have said they plan to do — will have to certify with the Student Exchange Visitor Program that the program is not entirely online and that each student is not taking entirely online course loads, per the press release. This will require schools submitting a Form I-20 for each student.

Students who are taking all-online courses will be required to leave the country or alter their non-immigrant status.

"Some believe the federal government has taken this action as a means to pressure colleges to fully reopen, despite the significant safety risks of doing so," Cevallos said in a Wednesday statement. "The measure disregards our

carefully considered planning this summer to protect the health and safety of our campus community during a worldwide pandemic."

"The result of this order, which is xenophobic at its core, would be to interrupt our international students' ability to continue their education in the US, which is a loss for our nation and our campus," Cevallos said."

The announced guidance undoes March 13 guidance which allowed for more flexibility for international students taking online courses, in light of the coronavirus pandemic, which shuttered campuses across the globe.

"No public good is served by these threats to deprive thousands of students at the University of Massachusetts from continuing to make valuable and necessary contributions to the economy of the Commonwealth and the prosperity of the nation," Meehan said in his statement.

Harvard and MIT, both in Cambridge, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court against the federal government on Wednesday, requesting a judge overturn the directive and instead reinstate the March 13 guidance.

"ICE's action leaves hundreds of thousands of international students with no educational options within the United States," the schools wrote in the lawsuit. "Just weeks from the start of the fall semester, these students are largely unable to transfer to universities providing on-campus instruction, notwithstanding ICE's suggestion that they might do so to avoid removal from the country. Moreover, for many students, returning to their home countries to participate in online instruction is impossible, impracticable, prohibitively expensive, and/or dangerous."

In Central Massachusetts, most colleges have announced a plan to reopen with a hybrid model in the fall, and the intent to transition to entirely-online instruction after Thanksgiving, including the UMass network, Clark University in Worcester, College of the Holy Cross in Worcester and Nichols College in Dudley. QCC plans to operate entirely online, at least for the fall semester.