ACS updates immigration policy statement, adds environmental and community health

The changes show support for simplifying visa processes and allow the ACS government affairs team to work with legislatures on environmental justice issues

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In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. This order, among other initiatives, created the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, which for the past 30 years has been working to address the negative human health and environmental effects of federal programs and policies. April 2023 signaled a renewed commitment to environmental justice from the highest level of government with the signing of Executive Order 14096, Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All, by President Joe Biden.

At the American Chemical Society, the Committee on Environment and Sustainability (CES) created a new statement that was adopted as official ACS policy. The statement, “Environmental and Community Health and the Chemical Enterprise,” will allow ACS’s government affairs team to work with legislators and regulators to cover environmental justice issues.

“The ACS’s new policy on environmental justice and equity enables ACS to collaborate with federal agencies on EJ&E challenges,” says Elise Fox, immediate past chair of CES. “The chemical

ACS policy statements

**Foster Innovation through Research and Technology**

**“Energy Policy”**: Endorses an energy policy that prioritizes energy efficiency and that includes the full life cycle costs of energy sources in their market prices, including the impacts on human health and the environment. It also encourages long-term orientation for both funding and incentives.

**“Intellectual Property”**: Encourages policies that improve the quality and consistency of granted patents as well as the efficiency of the patent process. Urges policymakers to support information technology upgrades to the US Copyright Office as well as to support sustainable open-access initiatives. Promotes consistent application of trade secret protections.

**“Science and Technology in the Budget”**: Urges policymakers to make investments in federal R&D funding to put the US at the forefront of R&D and recommends strategies to ensure that federal dollars dedicated to R&D are used as efficiently as possible.

**“US Business Climate”**: Supports a fair and level playing field that enhances competition and stimulates R&D. Supports policies that foster the growth of small R&D businesses and encourage entrepreneurship.

**“US Innovation and Entrepreneurship”**: Supports investment in a world-class workforce through education and training, long-term commitments to basic research and technology development, and the development of a sustainable infrastructure for innovation and entrepreneurship.

**Strengthen Science Education and the Scientific Workforce**

**“Disabilities”**: Supports ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Encourages international cooperation, the sharing of scientific knowledge, and R&D on assistive technologies in carrying out the requirement to implement the means for equal access to medical facilities, education, workplaces, and communication technologies.

**“Employment Nondiscrimination”**: Recommends federal legislation to extend protections against employment discrimination to include sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity.

**“Science Education”**: Supports ensuring that all students understand science in accordance with national standards; modernizing learning environments; strengthening science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teacher education programs; and nurturing students of all backgrounds, including those from underrepresented groups, in pursuit of studies and careers in STEM.

**“Visas for Immigration, Scientific Collaboration, and Academic Study”**: Supports visa policies that facilitate scientific education and exchange, and welcome foreign scholars, students, scientists, and engineers. Supports timely and reasonable screening processes for visits, greater transparency of the application process, and the issuance and management of visas that are more aligned with the purpose of academic study and scientific exchange. Supports simplifications of employer-sponsored permanent residency for US-educated foreign nationals, and supports revisions to the H1-B visa process.

**Advance Sustainability and the Environment**

**“Chemical Risk Assessment and Regulatory Decision Making”**: Supports risk assessments that are based on sound science, that are protective of human health and the environment, and that include necessary information from the commercial chemical enterprise while protecting confidential business information.

**“Climate Change”**: Reviews the science and recommends action on greenhouse gas reduction and strategies for climate change adaptation. Encourages continued funding for research into the effects of climate change while also emphasizing the importance of educating the public on the issue.
enterprise helped create many of these issues, but also has a unique role in helping solve them to create safer and healthier communities for all."

Policy statements summarize ACS’s official positions on important issues and are developed by committees with member input. In addition to the newly accepted environmental policy, what were previously two separate statements, “Visa Restrictions” and “Workforce-Related Immigration,” were updated to an inclusive “Visas for Immigration, Scientific Collaboration, and Academic Study.”

Other updated statements include “Intellectual Property,” “Sustainability and the Chemistry Enterprise,” and “Critical Materials.” Four statements were renewed without change:


Statements approved by the ACS Board of Directors are active for 3 years, after which they are then renewed or retired. With recent changes, ACS now has 24 active policy statements. These positions are categorized into four areas: innovation through research and technology, science education and workforce, sustainability and the environment, and science in the public policy arena.

The society also released its 2024 public policy agenda on Feb. 5. ACS plans to collaborate with and will encourage the US Congress and the Biden administration to support chemistry research through continued funding; to elevate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education and improve workforce training; to support navigable and efficient immigration programs for academic study and scientific collaboration; to take bold action to address climate change and improve sustainability in the chemistry enterprise; and to support universal access to high-quality scientific research.

ACS members interested in policy can offer input on statements that are up for revision. Members can also join the ACS member advocacy volunteer program, Act4Chemistry Legislative Action Network, and participate in their local section government affairs committee or enroll in one of the ACS advocacy workshops. Visit www.acs.org/policy for more information.

“Critical Materials”: Encourages comprehensive research and workforce development to ensure the sustainable development of US domestic supplies. Urges investment in R&D efforts and funding for the recovery and recycling of critical materials. Promotes updating US funding mechanisms to support interagency collaboration and outreach.

“Environmental and Community Health and the Chemical Enterprise”: Supports the efforts of the US government to create and fund programs that promote environmental justice.

“Regulation of Laboratory Waste”: Supports regulation reform for large-scale chemical manufacturing being applied to laboratories.

“The Science and Technology of Hydraulic Fracturing”: Recommends conducting research on fracking and its impacts from a life cycle perspective, its uses compared to replacement resources, methane emissions at fracking sites, causes and extent of groundwater contamination, less hazardous fracking fluids, and characterization of and methods for treating and disposing of liquid returns from fracking.

“Sustainability of the Chemistry Enterprise”: Defines the concept of sustainability in the context of the chemistry enterprise. Supports government incentives for sustainable technologies.

“Water Treatment and Conservation”: Supports US government action that develops water-use guidelines and initiatives; encourages advancements in water reduction, treatment, and reuse technologies; protects groundwater resources; and prevents discharge of toxic substances into ground and surface waters.

Science in the Public Policy Arena

“Ensuring Access to High-Quality Science”: Supports using sustainable publishing models that provide universal access to scientific research. Supports the 10 principles outlined by the international scientific, technical, and medical (STM) publishing community in the Brussels Declaration on STM Publishing.

“Forensic Science”: Calls for scientific rigor, high-quality education, and standards in forensic science application and for its integration with the broader scientific community. Backs evaluation and improvement of forensic analytical methods.

“Peer Review: Ensuring High-Quality Science”: Urges support for scientific peer review processes that evaluate grant applications on the basis of both intellectual merit and broader impacts and that are periodically evaluated for process effectiveness and efficiency and for reviewer freedom from interference in scientific merit assessments.

“Preventing the Reemergence of Chemical Weapons”: Supports efforts to improve chemical safety and security, and evaluation of alternative materials. Urges governments to prioritize actions surrounding establishing standards for responsible conduct and to prevent the use of pharmaceutical compounds as weapons. Further encourages the US government to continue its strong support of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.

“Safety in the Chemistry Enterprise”: Supports the use of risk-based criteria in creating safety regulations and policies. Supports continued funding of research to inform policymakers and stakeholders in the creation of those regulations and policies. Also supports government implementation of regulatory policies that foster innovation within a safer chemical environment.

“Scientific Freedom”: Advocates freedom of scientific exchange and stronger scientific collaboration to benefit humankind.

“Scientific Insight and Integrity”: Supports the use of insightful, comprehensive scientific and engineering input to the development and evaluation of policy options. Encourages scientific integrity policies that help the US federal government obtain and integrate scientific assessments into policy development and implementation.