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March 31, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Todd M. Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Secretary Noem and Acting Director Lyons:

We write with great concern about recent reports that Kseniia Petrova, a Russian citizen and Harvard Medical School researcher, had her J-1 scholar visa revoked over a month ago. Petrova, who has expressed fear of persecution if returned to Russia, has been detained since at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities pending a hearing before an immigration judge on May 7, 2025.¹

Petrova was returning to the United States from Paris, France, on February 16, 2025, when Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents at Boston Logan International Airport detained her and revoked her student visa after alleging that she failed to properly declare frog embryos, which she reportedly brought into the country at the request of her Harvard professor.² According to Petrova's attorney, upon her detention, CBP officials asked her whether they should notify the Russian government, to which she is reported to have responded: "I am scared to go back to Russia. I am afraid the Russian Federation will kill me for protesting against them."

Petrova was previously arrested in Russia for protesting against the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and calling for the impeachment of Vladimir Putin on her Facebook account.³ The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) found that Petrova indeed has a credible fear of return to Russia.⁴

¹ Maya Yang and Robert Mackey, *Russian scientist working at Harvard detained by Ice at Boston airport*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/27/russian-scientist-harvard-medical-school-ice-detention> (March 27, 2025).

² Marlene Lenthang and Sophie Comeau, *Russian medical researcher at Harvard, who protested the Ukraine war, detained by ICE*, NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/russian-medical-researcher-harvard-protected-ukraine-war-detained-ice-rcna198528> (March 28, 2025).

³ Maya Yang and Robert Mackey, *Russian scientist working at Harvard detained by Ice at Boston airport*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/27/russian-scientist-harvard-medical-school-ice-detention> (March 27, 2025).

⁴ Heather Morrison, *Harvard scientist 'planned to smuggle' frog embryos into US, Homeland Security says*, <https://www.masslive.com/news/2025/03/harvard-scientist-planned-to-smuggle-frog-embryos-into-us-homeland-security-says.html> (March 28, 2025).

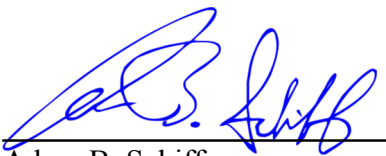
Petrova is currently facing prolonged detention. After detaining Petrova on February 16, 2025, CBP transferred her to an ICE facility in Vermont, and ultimately she was transferred to an ICE facility in Louisiana.⁵ Her preliminary hearing before an immigration judge is May 7, 2025, and her case could continue for months after that.⁶ In the meantime, Petrova is reportedly being held with at least 70 other detainees in the same cell.⁷

Absent evidence that Petrova is a flight risk or a danger to the community, we strongly urge you to reconsider ICE's recent decision not to grant Petrova parole and exercise discretion within your authority to release her from detention while her asylum case is pending.⁸

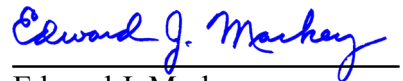
Moreover, we are deeply concerned about the possibility that Petrova could face persecution if deported to Russia. We urge the Administration to ensure full due process in her case and take all appropriate and necessary measures to ensure she is not deported to Russia.

Thank you for your prompt attention and consideration,

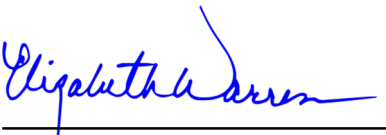
Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Senate
Foreign Relations Committee

⁵ William C. Mao and Veronica H. Paulus, *Russian HMS Researcher Detained at Louisiana ICE Facility After Visa Revocation*, The Harvard Crimson, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/3/28/hms-researcher-detained/> (March 28, 2025).

⁶ Id.

⁷ Emily Wax-Thibodeaux and Maria Sacchetti, *ICE detains Harvard researcher from Russia who protested Ukraine war*, Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/03/28/harvard-researcher-detained-ice-russia-deportation/> (March 28, 2025).

⁸ See 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5).

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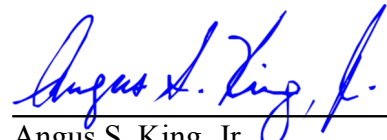
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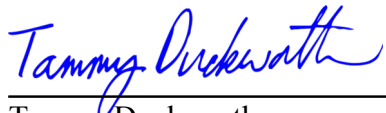
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