

ALERT

Lawmakers Urge DOJ to Address Foreign Influence on College Campuses

December 14, 2023

Last week, a group of Republican Senators sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland expressing concern over the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its influence among student groups at American universities.

U.S. Senators Jim Risch (R-ID), Tim Scott (R-SC), and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) authored the letter suggesting that the Chinese Government is using Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) across campuses to influence U.S. academic institutions and push the political agenda of the CCP. According to the letter, there are currently 150 known CSSA chapters on U.S. college campuses, many of which receive funding and guidance from Chinese Embassies. The letter further explains that, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, CSSA chapters “often serve as extensions of China’s party-state.” The Senators highlight an example from Wayne State University, in which CSSA and, subsequently, a Chinese consulate, “reportedly funded travel to China for the mayor of Ypsilanti, Michigan, and three other officials,” to promote a real estate project.

The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) requires any person acting as an “agent of a foreign principal” as defined under FARA to register with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) absent an exemption to registration. According to the letter, there is “clear evidence that CSSAs act as an arm of the PRC for the purpose of shaping U.S. policy and public opinion, and the United States should therefore evaluate whether they are required to register as foreign agents.” The letter requests that DOJ provide a response within 30 days outlining their efforts to assess and investigate CSSA’s influence on U.S. campuses, and whether it should be registered under FARA.

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Practice Areas

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This most recent letter reflects a continuing heightened focus of U.S. policymakers among others on foreign influence, including foreign funding, on college campuses.

Wiley's FARA Handbook provides further information on FARA as well as the relationship between FARA and the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA). Additional information on pending LDA and FARA reforms can also be found in our coverage of proposals in the 117th Congress and 2022 Review of FARA developments. Please contact the FARA attorney listed on this alert for any questions.

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Maddie Van Aken, a Legislative and Reporting Coordinator at Wiley Rein LLP, contributed to this alert.