

STATEMENT

by

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to the

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

*“A National Security Crisis: Foreign Language Capabilities
in the Federal Government.”*

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Thank you Senator Akaka for allowing me to testify.

The National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) is a federally funded program at the U.S. Department of State that has allowed me to do unimaginable things. Without the support from NSLI-Y, I would not have been granted the opportunities that I have experience such as going to Beijing twice in my lifetime along with speaking in front of you all today. Additionally, I would not have pursued learning the Chinese language. This program highlighted the importance of language, especially the Chinese language and how learning the language can benefit me.

Prior to graduating from high school, I had no interest in learning another language. As a student who attended Roosevelt High School in Washington, DC, the only goal on my mind was trying to graduate and maintain a GPA. However, during my 10th grade year, I was granted an opportunity that changed my life forever. After much convincing from my AP government teacher I applied for the Americans Promoting Study Abroad program also known as APSA. I figured this would be a way to view the world outside of my local periphery. But I took a chance and it paid off. I was offered the opportunity to study abroad in Beijing, China for six weeks to study Chinese language and culture.

I am forever grateful that NSLI-Y's funding granted me the opportunity to go to China. As a student who had never been on a plane prior to going to Beijing, this was a life-changing experience. I appreciate that APSA targets students that live in underrepresented communities across the nation because that's where dire attention needs focus now. It's not just the students who can afford these opportunities that are deemed "globally-aware" because of their travel experiences, but also through the lenses of students like me, and ones in underrepresented

communities because every student deserves a global experience. Trust me, it changed my life forever; it will do the same for another.

Since my experience, I decided to pursue a future career in the Foreign Service, an international development organization, or IGO/NGO. I recently finished my freshman year at George Mason University where I am pursuing a double major in Global Affairs with a concentration in international development and Chinese. I am also currently in the Chinese language buddy program at George Mason where you chat and build relationships with native Chinese citizens who come to study at Mason. Without NSLI-Y's funding, I would have probably pursue a career very different from the one I'm pursuing now.

After coming back from China, my life was forever changed. My perspectives, the stereotypes, and most importantly, my views about the globe and my career changed. I no longer viewed the world as uneven across the playing field. In my view, the world is on an even ground because going to China made me realize that I, and everyone else in the U.S. are not as different. We all are all seeking the goal of friendship, knowledge, and unity.

Programs such as Americans Promoting Study Abroad, which are funded through NSLI-Y and the State Department, are extremely necessary for the development of our future young generation because without them, we have limited views on the world. As the United States becomes more diverse, more interactive, more developed technology-wise, we have to understand that the only barrier that we have to break through is communication, especially through languages such as Chinese. Improving the foreign language capacity of the nation is crucial to the United States' success over this lifetime. In order to become powerful, we have to learn to adapt and learn new knowledge. Through language and immersion, you achieve both requirements. As our nation grows, we cannot forget the most important concept that allows us to the freedom to communicate, and that concept is language.

Thank you for your time.