

March 16, 2022

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
Governor of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

I write to commend your efforts to address a thorny issue that threatens to compromise our nation's security as well as the integrity of the research and development enterprise in Florida. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which the CCP controls, are using every available avenue in our open society to covertly advance a malign agenda. Research collaboration and educational exchange are no exception.

As you are no doubt aware, several cases of the PRC successfully penetrating our research institutions have been uncovered in Florida in recent years. In February 2021, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted a PRC national and former professor at the University of Florida (UF) who concealed his prior affiliations with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the armed wing of the CCP, in order to receive a U.S. visa. This individual allegedly obtained \$1.75 million in federal grant money through fraud, and was participating in a PRC talent program associated with a PRC university that had been blacklisted by the federal government for its ties to the PLA. In January 2020, four PRC nationals who held UF faculty positions either resigned or were terminated on account of undisclosed connections to PRC entities of concern. In December 2019, the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa forced out six employees, including its CEO, who had hid their professional and financial links to PRC recruitment programs, including personal bank accounts in China where they had received funds from the PRC.

In 2017, the University of Central Florida (UCF) terminated a professor of electrical engineering who was simultaneously employed by a PRC university linked to the PLA's nuclear weapons program. During his time at UCF, this PRC national shipped computer devices to China that have dual-use military applications without the proper export licenses. In 2018, another professor of computer and electrical engineering at UCF fled the U.S. when UCF officials discovered that he too was simultaneously employed by a PLA-affiliated university in the PRC. While some of these researchers were PRC citizens working legally in the U.S., others were U.S. citizens who were born and raised here. Scrutiny of individual researchers must be applied equally and across the board without regard for nationality or ethnic background.

Florida's recent enactment of two state laws, HB 7017 and HB 1523, intended to strengthen security vetting of research and development, including for foreign applicants seeking Florida-based research positions, is an excellent response to the threat that we face. I fear, however, that the PRC could recalibrate its collection efforts in the state to avert these laws. Beijing has a history of successful adaptation to changing political circumstances, and the CCP will certainly look for ways to circumvent whatever measures that we put in place. We must aim to stay a step ahead of their efforts to outwit us.

It is clear we face a problem with the PRC recruiting nontraditional agents, such as academics, residing in Florida and elsewhere in the U.S. to help Beijing acquire critical information and key technologies that have military applications. I appreciate your efforts to combat this problem and respectfully urge you to continue to use the authority of your office to ensure that educational institutions in Florida are doing their utmost to prevent Beijing's attempts to utilize our research and technology for malign purposes. Institutional links between universities in Florida and the PRC, including joint research programs, should be discouraged, and permitted only if and when conditions allow for due diligence to be performed to ensure that such academic collaboration is not being misappropriated for military purposes in the PRC.

Thank you again for your leadership and ongoing attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator