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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0523

“Occupations and Professions - Licenses, Certificates, and Registration - Immigrants”

**To:** Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

**From:** Ewaoluwa Ogundana

- I am a Public Policy graduate student at the University of Maryland College Park and I am also one of the 7,470 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients in Maryland, an immigration status that partially protects individuals who came to the U.S. as children.<sup>1</sup> This legislation will have a profound impact on the Maryland healthcare system, education system, and help the estimated 225,000 undocumented immigrants in the state if passed, and so I am asking the committee to give a favorable report on SB0523.<sup>2</sup>
- There are 13,000 other immigrants in Maryland who are eligible for DACA, but because Former President Trump ended the status in 2017 and a federal judge in Texas recently ruled that DACA was adopted illegally, a number of applications have been backlogged and no new applications have been accepted since July 2021.<sup>3 4</sup> As a result, these immigrants cannot obtain social security numbers which are needed to obtain licensure in Maryland in fields such as nursing, dentistry, medicine, accounting, etc. This legislation will help students like myself who have to deal with perpetual legal barriers towards our future education and career aspirations because there is no pathway to citizenship for our status.
- Passing this legislation will benefit Maryland in four significant ways:
  1. This legislation will alleviate the roadblocks to obtaining professional licenses and encourage more undocumented students to complete their education so that they do not resort to other fields just because those fields do not require licenses. It would be a loss to Maryland’s workforce if these students pursue other fields simply because the state bars them from obtaining professional licenses.

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<sup>1</sup> Migration Policy Institute. (2021). “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools.”

<sup>2</sup> Migration Policy Institute. (2019). “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: Maryland.”

<sup>3</sup> Migration Policy Institute. (2021). “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools.”

<sup>4</sup> Rodriguez, S., Gerstein, J. (2021). “Federal judge finds DACA unlawful, blocks new applicants,” Politico.

2. Almost 40% of Maryland's population hold jobs that require occupational licenses.<sup>5</sup> It is inconsistent to limit specific licenses from undocumented immigrants if the actual operation of that profession does not require citizenship. With this barrier in place, Maryland is not only limiting thousands of individuals from contributing to a workforce that is in dire need of help, but the state is indirectly also contributing to the community college enrollment decline propagated by the pandemic because these students discontinue their education.<sup>6</sup>
  3. Maryland already allows eligible undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates at any state college and university.<sup>7</sup> And since 2019, the state has allowed eligible Maryland students, including those who are undocumented, to attend community college tuition-free under its Community College Promise Scholarship Program.<sup>8</sup> Passing this legislation will be consistent with past comprehensive policies that have helped undocumented immigrants thus far in the state.
  4. Lastly, with COVID-19 surges and staff shortages in hospitals across the state, this legislation could also bring relief to Maryland's healthcare systems as more immigrants could obtain the necessary licenses to become healthcare professionals and continue the fight against COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>
- Overall, this legislation would give more undocumented students an incentive to finish their education, integrate into the professional sector, and make fuller contributions towards Maryland's community and economy. I respectfully urge the committee to give SB0523 a favorable report.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). "May 2020 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates," United States Department of Labor.

<sup>6</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2021). "Eight Percent Drop in Undergraduate Students Since Fall 2019; Community Colleges Lost 15 Percent of Students in Two Years."

<sup>7</sup> Maryland In-State Tuition Referendum passed in 2012

<sup>8</sup> Maryland Higher Education Commission Community College Promise Scholarship created in 2019

<sup>9</sup> Domen, J. (2021). "COVID-19 surge pushes a Maryland health system into 'contingency protocol,'" WTOP News.