

CHERYL C. KAGAN
Legislative District 17
Montgomery County

Vice Chair
Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Joint Audit Committee
Joint Committee on Federal Relations



Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Suite 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3134 · 410-841-3134
800-492-7122 Ext. 3134
Fax 301-858-3665 · 410-841-3665
Cheryl.Kagan@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB523: Occupations and Professions – Licenses – Immigrants

Senate Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee

Thursday, February 17, 2022 | 1:00 PM

As you surely know, massive labor shortages exist in critical professions in Maryland and around the country. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates that 500,000 nurses will leave the profession this year-- bringing the national total to 1.1 million vacancies. The lack of qualified health care workers has been exacerbated during the pandemic, putting our families and our neighbors at risk of receiving substandard care.

[35% of Maryland's acute care hospitals](#) have declared crisis standards due to severe staffing shortages and capacity overload. There are 3,900 nursing vacancies in state hospitals-- a 50% jump since last August (*Maryland Hospital Association/MHA*). These vacancies are costing our hospitals enormous sums of money in labor costs. Maryland hospitals have paid an additional [\\$435,000,000 in contract labor costs over pre-pandemic levels](#), often being forced to hire traveling nurses and [pay them double the average hourly cost](#) of a staff nurse.

Current law denies non-citizens many career opportunities based solely on their immigration status. [SB523](#) would authorize immigrants who are Maryland residents and meet all other qualifications to apply for occupational licensure by removing the criterion of citizenship.

SB523 would help more than the health care field. About [40% of workers in MD](#) hold positions that require professional or occupational licensure. [This includes at least 130 professions](#)-- teachers, electricians, home aides, mental health practitioners, social workers, bus drivers, police officers, veterinarians, cosmetologists, building contractors, and many, many more.

We already permit immigrants to pay in-state tuition rates and attend community college tuition-free. When these talented students graduate they cannot get a job in their field based solely on their citizenship status.

Five states (California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, & New Jersey) have updated their laws to allow qualified individuals, regardless of immigration status, to obtain occupational or professional licensure. **An additional nine states** (Arkansas, Florida, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, & Wyoming) allow licensure for certain immigration statuses and/or certain professions.

I urge a favorable report on SB523 to address the critical need for licensed workers in Maryland.