



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

February 17, 2022

Senate Bill 523: Occupations and Professions - Licenses, Certificates, and Registration – Immigrants

POSITION: FAVORABLE

On behalf of the members of the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM), we appreciate the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bill 523. HFAM represents over 170 skilled nursing centers and assisted living communities in Maryland, as well as nearly 80 associate businesses that offer products and services to healthcare providers. Our members provide services and employ individuals in nearly every jurisdiction in the state.

Senate Bill 523 prohibits a State occupational or professional licensing board or other government agency in the State from denying an occupational or professional license, certification, or registration to an immigrant if the individual meets certain requirements.

Workforce challenges such as recruitment and retention have long existed in health care, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have only grown worse over the last two years and they will likely remain even as we begin to navigate a post-pandemic world.

Healthcare across all settings is a people-helping-people enterprise. That is especially true in long-term and post-acute care settings such as skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers, assisted living campuses, continuing care retirement communities, and adult day centers.

We are in a healthcare workforce crisis and there is a shortage of workers in all roles ranging from physician to nursing assistant. The workforce shortage predates the COVID-19 pandemic and was driven by specific issues mostly related to education and training. In 2021 the Maryland Board of Nursing reported that 40,000 licensed individuals in Maryland had chosen not to renew their professional license.

As mentioned, the pressures of the pandemic dramatically worsened the workforce shortage. The most recent surge proved to us yet again that there is no individual hospital, nursing home, or physician's office workforce. There is one healthcare workforce in Maryland—and it is shorthanded.

We need all the caring hearts and trained hands we can get in healthcare. Current immigration status should not be a limiting factor in that.

Together going forward, we must be intentional about creating quality healthcare jobs and growing careers focused specifically on underserved communities and hiring our residents and citizens. We must also acknowledge that there are countless examples demonstrating that immigrants are the backbone that built much of this country, including in healthcare.

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Immigrants play a critical role in providing care for our most vulnerable citizens. According to PHI, the nation's leading authority on the direct care workforce, one in four direct care workers is an immigrant. Further, the total number of immigrants in direct care positions continues to grow, with an estimated 65 percent increase between 2005 and 2015.

Across care settings in Maryland and throughout the country, we fought the most recent surge of the virus with fewer people working in healthcare, and particularly fewer people working in skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers. Still, direct hours of care provided to Marylanders in skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers actually increased.

As we plan our long-term "new normal" in healthcare, we are placing considerable attention on how on-the-job training, apprenticeship, education, and experience can overlap to produce more licensed professionals in our setting. Underserved communities and immigrants will be key.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report from the Committee on Senate Bill 523.

Submitted by:

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