



# Office of The Mayor Celina Benitez

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## Testimony IN FAVOR of House Bill 454:

### Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations - Immigrants

To: Honorable Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Mayor Celina Benitez, City of Mount Rainier  
Date: Wednesday, February 22nd, 2023

As Mayor of the City of Mount Rainier, I have led efforts to make the city a welcoming environment for all residents, including our vibrant immigrant community, to make sure through actions and legislation that they know they belong and they are valued. As a first-generation immigrant whose family instilled the importance of giving back, I have always been an advocate for civil rights and for the empowerment of minority groups. These are some of the reasons that **House Bill 454** is deeply personal for me, and why I **strongly urge you to support this bill as a means of expanding employment opportunities to our immigrant community, and of equitably serving our increasingly diverse population and by doing so benefiting all of Maryland.**

Mount Rainier is a thriving diverse community. Our city values the contribution of all our residents equally, and benefits when access to employment is expanded to all. Having our residents employed also means they can provide for their families and continue to contribute to paying taxes and being involved in our community. Studies show that individuals benefit when they receive services from a workforce reflecting their community, and that trust and public safety are increased when residents receive culturally and linguistically appropriate assistance. The Pandemic has brought to light what we already knew there is a great need of medical professionals and HB454 would help us bridge that gap.

Current Maryland law requires all applicants for health occupational licensure to provide a Social Security Number; however, this requirement is not aligned with what's established constitutionally for licensing authorities, or with Maryland's economic interest, or with national trends, and lastly, it's not aligned with the state's investment in the immigrant community.

**I strongly supports House Bill 454 as a means of expanding health occupational licensure to our immigrant community for the following reasons:**

1. Maryland is home to a large immigrant community. According to the American Immigration Council, one in seven Maryland residents is an immigrant - or, almost one million individuals,

comprising 15% of the population. Maryland has made good strides in providing great opportunities to these communities, for example, by expanding in-state tuition and free community college access to all Marylanders, regardless of immigration status.

2. By not allowing all immigrants to have access to health occupational licenses that they are qualified for, the State is losing its investment as businesses lose not only competent labor, but also revenue. According to the Higher Ed Immigration Portal, there are 237,845 undocumented immigrants in the state - 15,485 of them who are DACA eligible. The spending power of just the DACA eligible population is over \$285 million, with a tax contribution of \$36 million.
3. Expanding access to health occupational licensing for immigrants would not only be in the State's best economic interest, but it would align with developments in other states that have expanded access, such as New Jersey—an individual does not need a Social Security Number to apply for licensure there.
4. Occupational licensing boards are not immigration enforcement authorities; their purpose is simply to determine if an individual possesses all qualifications to perform and safely serve the public in a particular profession.

Therefore, Maryland should follow the lead of other states to include individual Taxpayer identification number (TIN) as an alternative to Social Security Number requirements from health licensing applications, and thus expand the labor pool in our State, and unlock untapped potential for economic growth. **I strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 454**

I have seen firsthand immigrants striving through tremendous challenges, such as surviving a civil war, just as I did, to pursue better lives for themselves and their families and give back to their community. There is a deep need in today's workforce for the innovation and work ethic many in these communities bring to the table. The TIN achieves the same purpose as Social Security: the ability to report taxes. Employed Marylanders are a Win for all!

**The Office of the Mayor of Mount Rainier strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 454.**

Please don't hesitate to contact me [MayorBenitez@MountRainierMD.org](mailto:MayorBenitez@MountRainierMD.org) should you have any questions. Respectfully,

*Celina Benitez*

Mayor Celina Benitez, City of Mount Rainier, Maryland

First Latina Mayor of The City of Mount Rainier

First Latina Mayor of a City in the State of Maryland