

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 0454: Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations - Immigrants

TO: Chair Joseline Peña-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

DATE: Monday, February 20, 2023

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. **JOTF strongly supports House Bill 454 as a means of expanding occupational licensure to our immigrant community, of recouping investment in educational opportunities our state has funded, and of equitably serving our increasingly diverse population.**

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

The Institute for Justice ranks Maryland as 9th in most burdensome licensing laws and 21st in most broadly and onerously licensed state, with almost 60% of all low-income occupations requiring an occupational license. Three populations that have routinely been identified as being disproportionately burdened by licensing laws include immigrants, individuals with a criminal record, and veterans and their families. Senate Bill 187 would begin addressing this undue burden by opening up occupational licensing to individuals who have lawfully obtained an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. Updating this language in our statute would also align with national trends: states have in recent years been opening up licensure via an ITIN - for example, in New Jersey, California, Nevada and Arizona.

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. According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are an

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estimated 225,000 undocumented immigrants in Maryland; 2,000 undocumented students graduate Maryland high schools each year, and almost 10,000 undocumented students currently attend state institutions of higher education. Many of these students are pursuing careers in fields that require licensure, such as health occupations.

There are pathways for these individuals to be employed by using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), including by starting their own business or co-op. In 2018, 66,350 immigrant business owners accounted for 23 percent of all self-employed Maryland residents and generated \$1.7 billion in business income. 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 state tax contribution of \$36 million. By replacing the SSN requirement with an ITIN, this bill would expand the labor pool in our State, and unlock untapped potential for economic growth.

Maryland has made good strides in providing a measure of opportunity to these communities. Since the Dream Act referendum of 2012, Maryland provides in-state tuition rates for undocumented immigrants at any state college or university. Since 2019, all residents, regardless of immigration status, have also been able to use the Community College Promise Scholarship to attend community college tuition-free. As of the 2022-2023 school year, children of undocumented residents are also eligible for state financial aid and scholarships. The requirement for an SSN on occupational licensure applications does not align with recent directions in State policy, of offering in-state tuition to undocumented students, and stimulus assistance to non-citizens. Maryland is losing its investment in these populations by prohibiting them gainful employment in professions they have trained for and that have been subsidized by the State.

Broadening access to employment for qualified individuals will not only benefit immigrant families and the state of Maryland economically, but will also improve public safety, as healthcare workers will be more likely to seek out certification instead of circumventing it due to the SSN requirements. And, this bill will ensure more equitable service for our communities, as research has shown that diversity in health professions can increase cultural competence and decrease implicit bias.

For these reasons, **we strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 454.**

For more information, contact:

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