



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2023

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 454 - Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations - Immigrants

Summary: HB 454 works to tackle the healthcare worker shortage in Maryland by allowing immigrants to apply for health occupations licensure while they await their federal work authorization, meaning that the second our healthcare workers are federally eligible to be employed, they can immediately start work in their fields.

Overview: Maryland has the worst Emergency Room wait times in the nation at an average of 228 minutes. This can lead to horrifying incidents for patients in need of care, including one woman experiencing a miscarriage who [bled on the floor of a Harford County hospital for hours](#) and a child with aspiration pneumonia who [waited 23 hours in Wicomico County before being placed in a progressive care unit](#).

While there are many multi-faceted causes of these wait times, one thing is clear—Maryland needs more health care workers. The 2022 State of Maryland’s Health Care Workforce Report found that Maryland was [short 5,000 full-time nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses](#).

HB 454 cuts through bureaucratic red tape that legal immigrants face when applying for licensure so that they are able to work in the professions they are qualified for the day they become federally eligible to work.

Currently, Maryland’s application for health occupational licensure requires applicants to provide their Social Security Number (SSN). Many immigrants awaiting federal work authorization or an immigration status change (such as a change from a student visa to another type of legal status) do not yet have SSNs but already have an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).

HB 454 will allow immigrants to complete their application for licensure with an ITIN number, allowing their licensure application to run concurrently with their immigration work status application, rather than requiring the applicant to wait for their federal immigration status to be approved—a [process that can take several months](#)—and then wait several additional months for their licensure approval.

The bill does not change any other requirements for licensure; all applicants must still meet the educational and professional requirements for their health occupation. The bill further does not

change federal requirements for work authorization—employers will still be required to ensure someone is federally eligible to work before they can hire them.

There are several specific populations that will benefit from the provisions in HB 454:

1. Health care professionals from other countries specifically sought out by employers in Maryland.

Health occupations professionals are allowed to immigrate to the United States to work in their respective fields, provided that they complete the [Health Care Worker Certification Form](#) with USCIS. Maryland healthcare facilities in Maryland often recruit these workers to fill our critical health worker gap; however, because they cannot apply for licensure without an SSN, many of these workers first have to go to other states that do not have an SSN licensure requirement, including Florida and Nevada.

These are workers who have not only already received at least a bachelor's degree within their healthcare profession, but also want to come to Maryland and be employed in our health care facilities. Instead, they are forced to first start working in another state, meaning that Maryland loses out on months, if not years, of healthcare staffing from a qualified immigrant who wants to provide these services in our state but cannot because of the SSN requirement on our licensure applications.

2. Legal immigrants applying for a more permanent legal status.

There are many legal immigrants already in Maryland who have an ITIN but are barred from licensure because they do not yet have a Social Security Number. These immigrants include students on F-1 visas studying at Maryland institutions to be health occupations professionals in the state who want to work in their field in Maryland after graduation, but cannot even apply for professional licensure until their immigration application for a more permanent status (such as an H1-B visa) is approved—a process that can take many months.

These are students that have already been educated at institutions that rely on Maryland's tax dollars and who want to work in the health care professions in our state. By allowing them to apply for licensure with their ITIN, HB 454 will streamline the process for them so that they can apply their education by serving our communities.

Conclusion: HB 454 provides just one piece of the puzzle to help solve Maryland's healthcare worker shortage. By allowing immigrants to apply for health occupational licensure with their ITINs, the bill will help ensure that qualified immigrant healthcare professionals who want to work in Maryland are able to be employed on the first day they are federally eligible to work.

Thank you and I ask for a favorable report on HB 454.