



Indivisible: Central Maryland

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TESTIMONY FOR HB0533

Occupations and Professions - Licenses, Certificates, and Registration - Immigrants

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Peña-Melnyk et al

Committee: Economic Matters

Organization Submitting: Indivisible Central Maryland

Person Submitting: Liz Enagonio, Lead Advocate

Position: FAVORABLE

My name is Liz Enagonio, representing both myself and Indivisible Central Maryland, a grassroots organization of constituents dedicated to protecting progressive and democratic values. **Indivisible Central Maryland strongly supports HB0533.**

You have seen and heard other testimony today that lays out the data regarding immigrant workers in Maryland: that one in five workers in Maryland is an immigrant; that more than 30% of immigrants 25 years and older have a bachelor's degree or higher; that many of these people are working non-professional, low wage jobs due to inability to obtain professional licensure. The increase in wages that would result from fully employing trained immigrant professionals could add millions of dollars in tax revenue.

So instead of repeating data, please allow me to tell a personal story of my friends from Guatemala who were granted asylum here in Maryland after being threatened at home with murder and the murder of their family members.

It's a tale of a Dad, his wife, and two little children who were financially successful in Guatemala. Dad has a bachelor's degree in music and a master's degree in education. He was a music teacher in the school system in Guatemala, and he organized and conducted a youth community band. On weekends, he was an audio engineer. He also played trumpet, piano and guitar in a band. Because of his financial success, he was targeted by gangs, who threatened to murder him and his family if he did not pay a large sum. A friend was murdered, and the friend's body left as a warning in front of this Dad's home. Dad and his family came to the border in Texas, seeking asylum. Dad was found to have a credible fear, and was granted asylum.

So here we have in Maryland a skilled teacher, with experience teaching multiple age groups. However, due to licensure laws promulgated by the federal government, he has not been able to translate his teaching degree from Guatemala to a teaching position here. He is currently working

construction. Yes, we need his skills there for sure, but he would have a greater opportunity to advance and to provide for his family if he had the opportunity to seek teaching opportunities. Granting professional licenses to immigrants such as this Dad would enable them to become self-sufficient and participate in the economic development of their communities.

Similarly, one of his sisters, who also resides here in Maryland, had an early childhood education certification in Guatemala. She now works at a fast food restaurant. What a waste of her talent and experience, when she could be in a career where we are short of highly qualified and experienced workers. Granting professional licenses to immigrants would allow employers to fill jobs and enable immigrants such as this woman to contribute their skills to the state's workforce.

For all these reasons, Indivisible Central Maryland strongly **SUPPORTS HB0533**. Thank you.