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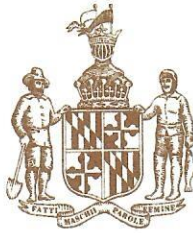
*Vice Chair*

Health and Government  
Operations Committee

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Insurance and Pharmaceuticals

Chair, Public Health and  
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## *The Maryland House of Delegates*

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### **HB 533 Occupations and Professions – Licenses, Certificates, and Registration – Immigrants**

#### **Testimony of Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk (FAVORABLE)**

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee, I am pleased to present House Bill (HB) 533. This bill will help fill critical labor shortages by expanding access to occupational licenses.

We are currently in a workforce crisis that we have long been trying to prevent, causing immense strain to our workers and our economy. Expanding access to occupational licensure will provide immediate relief - helping those who have been helping us navigate a pandemic for over two years. Hospitals are currently experiencing a crisis staffing situation - the worst in over 570 days of fighting the pandemic. Nursing homes alone have seen its industry's employment level drop by 14 percent (221,000 jobs) since the beginning of the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Teachers and support staff are exhausted. Maryland's largest school district, Montgomery County, has vacancies for 325 teachers, about 105 paraeducators, and nearly 100 other support staff.<sup>2</sup> There are not enough substitute teachers to provide coverage during staff absences due to COVID-19 infections. Shortages of skilled laborers in Maryland are causing some construction projects to cost millions of dollars more than original estimates<sup>3</sup>. Everyone is impacted due to workforce shortages - our sick, our children, and our communities. We need trained, qualified people to step into these positions. Expanding access to occupational licensure would provide an employment pool of quality and dynamic individuals while diversifying workforces to better serve all communities in Maryland.

Expanding licensure to all Marylanders would result in economic benefits for the state and local communities. Undocumented residents in Maryland play an important role in the state's economy, with a total spending power of \$4.5 billion.<sup>4</sup> Licensing requirements that prevent all qualified residents from finding employment in their chosen professions cost the state in lost tax revenue. In 2019, undocumented residents alone paid \$262.4 million in state and local taxes.<sup>5</sup> This was while working the lowest paying and most dangerous jobs. The increase in wages that would result from employing trained professionals could add millions of dollars in revenue to the State.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ahcancal.org/News-and-Communications/Fact-Sheets/FactSheets/BLS-Report-LTC-Job-Losses.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/teachers-protest-staffing-shortages-in-maryland-school-system/2021/10/27/6ca45dd4-371f-11ec-8be3-e14aaacfa8ac\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/teachers-protest-staffing-shortages-in-maryland-school-system/2021/10/27/6ca45dd4-371f-11ec-8be3-e14aaacfa8ac_story.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.baltimoresun.com/business/bs-bz-maryland-labor-shortage-20191215-owedj4ww5f2dkvfkezpexhtze-story.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/maryland/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/maryland/>

Increasing the earnings for this population would increase economic contributions across all sectors. Immigrants are more likely to be working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts. 84.7% of undocumented immigrants are of working age.<sup>6</sup> This means they are more likely to be active in the labor force, allowing them to contribute to the economy not only as consumers but also as taxpayers, helping fund social services and other programs. Expanding access to occupational licensure would result in a collective contribution of millions of dollars to our economy.

Licensure can be attained through community college programs. Community colleges have seen some of the greatest enrollment declines because of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Undocumented students often start out at community colleges to attain their higher education because of their lower costs and closeness to home.<sup>8</sup> This bill will help increase student enrollment and create an influx of money at community colleges in Maryland.

Upon enactment, Maryland would join 14 states including New Jersey, California, and Illinois, who have passed legislation related to expanding occupational licensure, regardless of immigration status. This bill is a solution where everyone benefits - individuals can increase their economic contributions to the state, while helping the businesses more readily meet their workforce needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 533. I respectfully request a favorable report.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/maryland/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cc.20483?saml\\_referrer](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cc.20483?saml_referrer)