



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB0454: Health Occupations- Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations- Immigrants

POSITION: Support

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The League of Women Voters Maryland supports **HB 454: Health Occupations- Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations- Immigrants**. This bill would allow qualified immigrants with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) to obtain healthcare licensure, regardless of their documentation status.

The League supports a system for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status, including citizenship, by paying taxes, learning English, studying civics, and meeting other relevant criteria. The League believes that immigration policies should not only be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises in their countries of origin, but that those policies should also meet the economic, business, and employment needs of the United States.

There is a healthcare workforce crisis in Maryland. Because of an aging healthcare workforce and burnout from the pressures of the pandemic, **the Maryland Hospital Association estimates¹ that one in every four hospital nursing positions is vacant.** Inadequate staffing can lead to delayed care, clogged emergency rooms, closed units, and failed discharge plans.

Maryland's healthcare needs are growing, with the Department of Aging estimating that **by 2040, there will be 1.79 million Marylanders over the age of 60.** Thus, along with more nurses, Maryland will need additional licensed healthcare workers such as Certified Medication Technicians and Certified Nursing Assistants to staff assisted living and senior care centers, skilled nursing and rehab facilities, adult day care centers, schools, group homes for individuals with developmental disabilities, community and behavioral health centers, and hospices.

One way to relieve the critical staffing shortage is by reducing existing barriers to obtaining licensure. At present, a Social Security number (SSN) is needed to obtain a healthcare license in Maryland. **But passage of Senate Bill 187 would modify that requirement, enabling qualified individuals who have met all educational requirements to use an ITIN to apply for their healthcare license.**

¹ <https://www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2022-state-of-maryland-s-health-care-workforce-report.pdf>

The ITIN was created by the IRS to allow non-citizens to pay taxes even if their immigration status makes them ineligible for a Social Security number (SSN). **This includes individuals who are lawfully present in the U.S but who still don't qualify for an SSN.**

Undocumented immigrants pay taxes. In Maryland, almost 85% of undocumented immigrants are of working age (16-64). According to the American Immigration Council,² they paid \$377.5 million in federal taxes and \$262.4 million in state and local taxes in 2019. Undocumented immigrants contribute to our economy both as consumers and taxpayers, helping to fund programs such as Medicare and Social Security, despite being unable to benefit from them.

Undocumented immigrants are educated. According to the Migration Policy Institute,³ Maryland's undocumented immigrant population in 2019 was 225,000. Of adults age 25 or older, 56% had graduated from high school, attended some college, or had an associate's, bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree.

Immigration status is not a barrier to many state benefits. Undocumented immigrants can obtain Maryland driver's licenses, and with an ITIN are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Maryland supports the education of eligible undocumented students by allowing them to attend community college tuition-free, and to pay in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities. But without a social security number, these students, whose education and training may have been partially subsidized by the state, are unable to use that training to obtain professional licensure. This limits their ability to both advance in their profession, and to assist in meeting our growing workforce needs.

Maryland's healthcare facilities are suffering from a severe healthcare labor shortage, which is expected to worsen. Substantial numbers of workers left the healthcare field during the pandemic, and our growing aging population makes that labor shortage even more urgent. Passage of Senate Bill 187 will enable qualified immigrant students with ITINs- some of whom are lawfully present in the U.S.- to obtain the healthcare licensure enabling them to work in their chosen profession, while helping to meet Maryland's urgent healthcare workforce needs.

For these reasons, the League and its 1,500+ members urge the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 454.

² <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/maryland/>

³ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/authorized-immigrant-population/state/MD>