



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 454

Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations – Immigrants

To: Chair Pena-Melanyk, and Members of the House Health Government and Operations Committee

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation – representing 10,000 healthcare workers in long-term care facilities and hospitals across Maryland.

1199 SEIU stands with our immigrant members and supports HB 454 to expand healthcare licensure to the immigrant community for the following reasons:

1. Maryland is experiencing a **serious staffing crisis** that is impacting the quality of care for patients. By not allowing all immigrants to have access to health occupational licenses that they are qualified for, the State is losing its investment as businesses lose not only revenue, but also competent and much-needed labor.
2. Increasing educational pipelines to health occupations for all students will be essential to address the staffing crisis. According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are an 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 in the United States by using an ITIN including starting their own business or co-op.
3. Expanding access to health occupational licensing for immigrants would not only be in the State's best economic interest, but it would align with developments in other states that have expanded access, such as New Jersey—an individual does not need a Social Security Number to apply for licensure there.
4. Occupational licensing boards are not immigration enforcement authorities; their purpose is simply to determine if an individual possesses all qualifications to perform and safely serve the public in a particular profession.

The care work our 1199 members do every day has been undervalued due to the intersecting legacies of racism, sexism, and xenophobia. We hope legislators will stand against xenophobia and remove barriers to expand the labor pool in the State. We urge a favorable report on House Bill 454.

In Unity,

Ricarra Jones

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