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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB454

“Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations - Immigrants”

To: Honorable Representative Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Ewaoluwa Obatuase

- I am a graduate student at the University of Maryland College Park and I am also one of the 7,470 Dreamers in Maryland.<sup>1</sup>
- **I am asking the committee to give a favorable report on HB454 for the following reasons:**
  - This legislation will have a profound impact on the Maryland healthcare system, education system, and benefit the almost one million individuals, comprising 15% of the population who are immigrants in the state.<sup>2</sup>
  - There are about 13,000 other immigrants in Maryland who are eligible to be a Dreamer and are legally authorized to work with an ITIN, but due to administrative delays and backlogs in the immigration system, these individuals cannot obtain social security numbers that are needed to obtain licensure in Maryland and work in healthcare fields such as nursing, dentistry, or medicine. This legislation will help students and Dreamers like myself to work in professional fields that we desire and help our home state of Maryland.
  - Passing this legislation will also benefit Maryland in four significant ways:
    1. This legislation will alleviate the roadblocks to obtaining health professional licenses and encourage more students authorized to work with an ITIN to complete their education so that they do not resort to other fields just because those fields do not require licenses. It would be a loss to Maryland’s workforce if these students pursue other fields simply because the state bars them from working as licensed healthcare professionals. Ultimately, by not allowing individuals authorized to work to have access to health occupational licenses that they are qualified for, the State is losing its investment as businesses lose not only competent labor, but also revenue.

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<sup>1</sup> Migration Policy Institute. (2021). “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools.”

<sup>2</sup> American Immigration Council

2. It is inconsistent to limit healthcare licenses from individuals authorized to work if the actual operation of that profession does not require citizenship. With this barrier in place, Maryland is not only limiting thousands of individuals from contributing to a workforce that is in dire need of help, but the state is indirectly also contributing to the enrollment decline/dropout rates in colleges still propagated by the 2020 pandemic because these students discontinue their education.<sup>3</sup>
3. Maryland already allows eligible immigrant students to pay in-state tuition rates at any state college and university.<sup>4</sup> Passing this legislation will be consistent with past comprehensive policies that have helped immigrant students thus far in the state.
4. Lastly, with shortages and impacts still lingering from the 2020 pandemic, this legislation will help hospitals and healthcare offices across the state. Passing this legislation would bring relief to Maryland's healthcare systems as more eligible immigrants could obtain the necessary licenses to become healthcare professionals and help strengthen Maryland residents' health and economy.

I respectfully urge the committee to give HB454 a favorable report.

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<sup>3</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2021). "Eight Percent Drop in Undergraduate Students Since Fall 2019; Community Colleges Lost 15 Percent of Students in Two Years."

<sup>4</sup> Maryland In-State Tuition Referendum passed in 2012