



Maryland  
Hospital Association

## **House Bill 454- Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations - Immigrants**

**Position: *Support***

February 22, 2023

House Health & Government Operations Committee

### **MHA Position**

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 454.

Maryland hospitals are facing the most critical staffing shortage in recent memory. A 2022 [GlobalData](#) report estimates a statewide shortage of 5,000 full-time registered nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses. Without intervention, shortages could double or even triple by 2035. MHA's [2022 State of Maryland's Health Care Workforce report](#) outlines a roadmap to ensure Maryland has the health care workforce it needs now and into the future. The report recommends policymakers remove barriers for internationally educated nurses to ensure the state can tap into all potential sources to hire more nurses.

Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants make up 39% of Maryland's hospital workforce.<sup>1</sup> The latest hospital data from Q3 2022 show nursing and medical positions (RNs, NPs, MDs, etc.) have an employee vacancy rate of 19.3%—a 59.6% increase between Q1 2021 and Q3 2022. These vacancies mean fewer caregivers at the bedside, limiting capacity to care for patients. Removing barriers for internationally educated nurses will increase the number of experienced nurses in the state and help retain health care workers by reducing the high vacancy rates.

House Bill 454 ensures every qualified health care professional can apply for a license to practice in Maryland. This legislation will make the state more competitive by removing a significant barrier for internationally educated nurses. The sponsor's amendments allow alternative identification to be used to obtain a health occupations license, including an individual taxpayer identification number or alternative documentation as permitted by the federal Social Security Act. The amendments also prohibit the health occupations boards from requiring a SSN or ITIN as a condition of licensure or certification if the applicant does not have one.

Currently the Maryland Board of Nursing requires a SSN to apply for a license.<sup>2</sup> This means internationally educated nurses cannot apply to take the national licensing exam from their home countries like they can in other states. For an international nurse to work in Maryland they must

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<sup>1</sup> MHA Workforce Survey – January 2023

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Board of Nursing. (2012). "[International Application Instructions for Graduates of Schools Outside the United States.](#)"

first obtain a license in another state and then endorse their license here. This is a lengthy and expensive process and encourages nurses to seek licensure in other states with fewer barriers.

By allowing internationally educated nurses to obtain their initial license in Maryland, we can lower expenses incurred by these nurses and decrease the amount of time they spend waiting to deliver care at the bedside. Other states randomly assign a nine-digit number or require a signed affidavit to be used as a placeholder until the SSN can be provided.<sup>3</sup> These are effective strategies that Maryland could use too.

Maryland hospitals are hiring internationally educated nurses. Earlier this month, one community hospital welcomed the first three of 65 international nurses. These nurses are experienced and bring diversity through language, culture, and experience to our health care workforce. In a time when the health care workforce is struggling, legislation like HB 454 can make a significant difference and support Maryland hospitals across the state.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable* report on HB 454.

For more information, please contact:  
Jane Krienke, Senior Legislative Analyst  
[jkrienke@mhaonline.org](mailto:jkrienke@mhaonline.org)

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<sup>3</sup>State examples: Use a generated number to apply but require SSN before issuing the license (FL, NY, NV, TX, SD). Require signed affidavit that as soon as an individual becomes eligible for a SSN, he or she will provide the Board with the SSN. Failure to comply results in the license not being renewed ([DC](#), [DE](#), [IL](#)). Utilize an ITIN instead of an SSN ([CA](#)).