



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

HB 454 - Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations - Immigrants

DATE: February 22, 2023
COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations Committee
POSITION: Favorable
FROM: The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I urge the committee to give HB 454 - Health Occupations - Licenses, Certificates, and Registrations – Immigrants a favorable report.

This bill would help address a critical labor shortage in health care services by expanding access to occupational licenses, certificates, and registrations to qualified immigrants. Frederick County, like communities across the country, has faced challenges in meeting the demand for health care services during and after the pandemic. In fact, the federal government has designated areas of Frederick County as Health Professional Shortage Areas in primary care (short 12 FTE), mental health (short 3 FTE), and dental health (short 30 FTE).¹

Furthermore, the Maryland Hospital Association’s “2022 State of Maryland’s Health Care Workforce Report” highlighted how the workforce shortage is particularly problematic in the nursing sector. Their findings indicate Maryland is currently short 5,000 full-time registered nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses. The overall vacancy rate in hospital occupations is 21% in the state of Maryland, with Licensed Practical (Vocational) Nurses (LPNs) facing a vacancy rate of over 37%. LPNs, RNs, Respiratory Therapists, and Nursing Assistants are among the top hospital occupations representing the highest vacancy rates. Even more troubling is the prediction that by 2035, Maryland will need an additional 13,800 RNs and 9,200 LPNs to meet our community’s need. We must make policy changes today to avoid a compounded healthcare crisis in the near future.

In addition to staffing shortages, the Maryland Hospital Association’s report noted that the changing patient population requires additional resources. While an aging population will require more personnel, a shift in demographics calls for additional training in cultural competency and a more diverse health care workforce. Research has shown that increased cultural competency and diversity in health care settings improves access for underserved groups, improves patient outcomes, and reduces disparities.²

Fortunately, the Maryland Hospital Association also identified several ways that policymakers could address the worker shortage while also diversifying our workforce, including simplifying arduous state processes for hiring international or immigrant nurses and reducing arbitrary barriers to licensure. HB 454 implements these recommendations. Expanding access to occupational

¹ [HPSA Find \(hrsa.gov\)](https://www.hrsa.gov/)

² [Study Finds Patients Prefer Doctors Who Share Their Same Race/Ethnicity - Penn Medicine](#)

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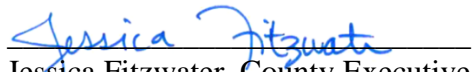
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licensure would expand our employment pool and diversify our workforces to better serve all our communities.

Frederick County has a growing immigrant population and has been making efforts to better support this community, including the creation of the Immigrant Affairs Commission. By expanding access to occupational licensure, we can not only offer more employment opportunities for our immigrant population, but also create a healthcare system that better reflects and serves our community.

Expanding access to licensure for health occupations will provide more opportunity to qualified individuals, enable the state to address critical workforce shortages, and contribute to better health care outcomes for all our residents.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 454. I urge the committee to give this bill with a favorable report.



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD