



Office of The Mayor Celina Benitez

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Testimony IN FAVOR of HB 0136: Child Support Enforcement – Occupational and Recreational Licenses - Taxpayer Identification Number

To: Honorable Luke Clippinger, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee
From: Mayor Celina Benitez, City of Mount Rainier
Date: Monday, January 23, 2023

As Mayor of the City of Mount Rainier, I have led efforts to make the city a welcoming environment for all residents, including our vibrant immigrant community, to make sure through actions and legislation that they know they belong and they are valued. As a first-generation immigrant whose family instilled the importance of giving back, I have always been an advocate for civil rights and for the empowerment of minority groups. Throughout my career in political advocacy for immigrant's rights, I have connected my personal history with the broader cause of justice. These are some of the reasons that **House Bill 0136** is deeply personal for me, and why I **strongly urge you to support this bill as a means of expanding employment opportunities to our immigrant community, and of equitably serving our increasingly diverse population and by doing so benefiting all of Maryland.**

Mount Rainier is a thriving diverse community of over eight-thousand residents. Our city values the contribution of all our residents equally, and benefits when access to employment is expanded to all. Having our residents employed also means they can provide for their families and continue to contribute to paying taxes and being involved in our community. Studies show that individuals benefit when they receive services from a workforce reflecting their community, and that trust and public safety are increased when residents receive culturally and linguistically appropriate assistance.

Statewide, according to the Migration Policy Institute, an estimated 225,000 undocumented immigrants reside 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 and childcare. Fields that are urgently in need of more personnel in order to serve Marylanders. Maryland currently offers in-state tuition and free community college to these individuals, yet does not allow them to pursue gainful employment, thus losing its investment in these communities.

I have seen firsthand immigrants striving through tremendous challenges, such as surviving a civil war, just as I did, to pursue better lives for themselves and their families and give back to their community. There is a deep need in today's workforce for the innovation and work ethic many in these communities bring to the table. It is time for our State to follow the lead of states like California, Colorado, and New Jersey in expanding access to employment through occupational licensure to individuals who have lawfully obtained a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) and in doing so be true to our core values.

The Office of the Mayor of Mount Rainier strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 0136.

please don't hesitate to contact me MayorBenitez@MountRainierMD.org should you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Celina Benitez

Mayor Celina Benitez, City of Mount Rainier, Maryland
First Latina Mayor of The City of Mount Rainier
First Latina Mayor of a City in the State of Maryland