



*January 26, 2023 - Testimony in support House Bill 136*

*To: Members of the Judiciary Committee*

*From: Mo Kantner, Director, State & Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council*

My name is Mo Kantner, and I am the Director of State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council (the Council), an organization that works to advance positive public attitudes and create a more welcoming America—one that provides a fair process for immigrants and adopts immigration laws and policies that take into account the needs of the U.S. economy.

I am testifying to express support for removing barriers that keep qualified Maryland residents from successfully applying for professional and occupational licenses. To this end, I respectfully encourage the passage of HB 0136, which would reduce barriers to career advancement for all Marylanders, including immigrants and refugees.

My organization has worked with leaders in government, business, and civil society across the country to recognize the crucial role immigrants are playing in state and local economies, including in some of the fastest-growing and most in-demand fields like healthcare, education, and social work. In order to remain competitive and meet critical workforce shortages, Maryland will need to implement policies that not only attract and retain immigrant talent that complements U.S.-born workers, but also build career pathways for the immigrants and refugees already living in the state.

One way to achieve this goal is to expand access to professional and occupational licenses for non-citizens. Maryland licensing boards can currently prohibit many non-citizens from obtaining occupational licenses, certificates, and registrations in high-demand fields solely due to their immigration status. HB 0136 would remove such barriers, thereby expanding economic opportunity for all residents and helping to meet the state's pressing workforce needs.

To help illustrate why this measure is so important, and why it makes sense to reduce barriers for all qualified Maryland residents, my organization has conducted quantitative research on the impact immigrants and refugees already have on the state. What we found is striking. According to American Immigration Council analysis of 2019 American Community Survey and Lightcast Labor Insights data:

- **As of 2019, Maryland is home to more than 922,441 immigrants, making up 15.3 percent of the state's population.** These new Americans are critical to addressing the state's workforce shortages across the skills and education spectrum, with 79.4 percent of immigrant Marylanders being of working age (ages 16-64) compared to 61.8 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts, and one in five immigrants holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

- **Maryland has a growing demand for healthcare workers, educators, and social workers**, all fields that have been critical in the state’s response and recovery from the ongoing COVID pandemic. The Council’s analysis has found that:
  - **From 2017 to 2021, Maryland saw a large increase in demand for healthcare support positions.** The demand for nursing assistants doubled (105.2 percent), MRI technologists increased by 101.8 percent, respiratory therapists increased by 96.4 percent, and licensed nursing practitioners increased by 93.3 percent.
  - **Job postings for elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers also increased during that same period.** The demand for elementary school teachers increased the most growing by 189.4 percent. Demand for kindergarten teachers increased by 121.4 percent, middle school teaching postings increased by 108.1 percent, and demand for secondary school positions increased by 107.7 percent.
  - **The need for social workers has also become apparent.** Job postings for social workers and healthcare social workers increased by increased 78.1 percent and 69.7 percent, respectively, between 2017 and 2021.
- **Despite barriers to entry, immigrants are already helping fill critical workforce shortages in high-need industries.** The Council’s research found that 28.8 percent of those employed in nursing related professions (e.g., RNs, LPNs, nursing assistants, and home health aides), 9.5 percent of workers in educational professions (elementary, middle, and secondary school) and 10.9 percent of workers employed in social work professions were born outside of the United States.

As Maryland continues to address the demand for workers across the skills and education spectrum, it is critical to retain and leverage this talent. More than a dozen states have taken similar steps to reduce barriers to professional and occupational licenses, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Nevada. Maryland is in a position to take decisive action to support and leverage the skills of the state’s future workforce. I encourage the Committee to support the passage of HB 0136.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mo Kantner  
 Director, State and Local Initiatives  
 American Immigration Council