



Board of Physicians

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Harbhajan Ajrawat, M.D., Chair

2024 SESSION POSITION PAPER

BILL NO.: HB 1054 – Physicians – Licensing – Foreign Practicing Physicians
COMMITTEE: Health & Government Operations
POSITION: Favorable With Amendments

TITLE: Physicians – Licensing – Foreign Practicing Physicians

POSITION & RATIONALE:

The Maryland Board of Physicians (the Board) is respectfully submitting this letter of support with amendments for House Bill (HB) 1054 – Physicians – Licensing – Foreign Practicing Physicians. While the Board believes the approach outlined in HB 1054 is not feasible for the Board as written, the Board has been closely following the issue of how to handle international medical graduates (IMGs) and internationally practicing physicians, and is eager to work with the bill sponsor and stakeholders to explore ways to bring qualified practitioners with international training or experience into the Maryland workforce.

Under current law, IMGs who graduate from a program approved by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) may qualify for licensure as a physician in Maryland, provided they have at least two years of postgraduate training in an accredited residency or fellowship program. However, some stakeholders have raised concern that the residency program is a limiting factor for IMGs, with some residency programs favoring graduates of US medical schools. This process also does not address internationally practicing physicians, who are required under current law to undergo a medical residency unless they meet the requirements for licensure by conceded eminence.

This problem is not specific to Maryland, and almost every state has similar requirements for IMGs. As a result, many states have begun exploring ways to address IMGs who were unable to match with a residency program, as well as internationally practicing physicians. For example, as part of a 2019 effort to increase access to healthcare in underserved areas, Massachusetts established a Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals. This commission released a final report in July 2022 outlining the issues and including near-, mid-, and long-term recommendations to address these deficiencies. Other states such as Maine, Tennessee, and Arizona have similarly begun exploring this issue.

In addition to state medical boards, some national groups have also begun looking into the issue of IMGs and internationally practicing physicians. In its most recent message to member boards, Dr. Humayun J. Chaudry, CEO of the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) stated that following a discussion of issues with unmatched US medical graduates and IMGs, the FSMB board of directors adopted an action to approve “support of the FSMB partnering with the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), Intealth, and other relevant organizations to study alternate licensing models that are being contemplated or legislated, in order to offer recommendations to address access to care issues in a way that is thoughtful and assures patient safety and protection as paramount.” Based on discussions with FSMB, the Board expects to see recommendations as early as September 2024.

While the Board acknowledges the importance of this issue, the language in HB 1054 proposes a model that goes beyond the Board's resources and expertise. Establishing a consortium of postgraduate medical education programs and developing and administering an examination and review process for internationally practicing physicians would require a significant outlay of resources, as indicated in the Board's fiscal note. Examinations for physician licensure are developed and administered by the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE), a national program governed by FSMB, ECFMG, the National Board of Medical Examiners, and other stakeholders. The Board believes the USMLE is the appropriate body to establish and administer medical examinations.

Instead, the Board recommends building off the work already done by other state medical boards and organizations such as FSMB. The Board proposes reviewing both the current process for IMGs and internationally practicing physicians and how other bodies are handling this issue, and making recommendations to the legislature accordingly. This would include reviewing other states with alternate licensing models, studies such as those performed by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, and recommendations by entities such as FSMB.

Therefore, the Board urges a favorable report on HB 1054, with an amendment striking the bill and replacing it with language requiring that on or before December 1, 2024, the Board makes a report to the Maryland General Assembly reviewing the current process for international medical graduates and internationally practicing physicians seeking licensure in Maryland as well as the process in other states, and the findings and recommendations of groups to include at a minimum the Federation of State Medical Boards and the Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates.

Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Matthew Dudzic, Manager of Policy and Legislation, Maryland Board of Physicians, (410) 764-5042.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Singh Ajrawat". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harbhajan Ajrawat, M.D.
Chair, Maryland Board of Physicians

The opinion of the Board expressed in this document does not necessarily reflect that of the Maryland Department of Health or the Administration.