

Maryland General Assembly
Health and Government Operations
Annapolis, Maryland

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1199 – Physicians - Licensing - Internationally Trained Physicians

Chair Pena- Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Shafat Hassan, a foreign-trained physician, with over a decade of experience in general dermatology, skin cancers, and public health. My qualifications include an M.D., Ph.D., Fellowship, MPH, along with several diplomas and specialized training in dermatology, oncology, and public health. I strongly support House Bill 1199, which aims to establish pathways for internationally trained physicians (ITPs) to practice in Maryland without the requirement of completing an additional residency.

Maryland faces a growing physician shortage, particularly in underserved communities, and this gap is impacting patient care. During my time observing in the Cutaneous Medical Oncology unit at Johns Hopkins, I saw patients with aggressive skin cancers whose disease had progressed to advanced stages by the time they arrived for treatment. The shortage of specialists and long waiting times left them without timely care, allowing their conditions to worsen. This is not an isolated issue—many Marylanders face similar challenges in accessing specialized medical care. Meanwhile, highly skilled foreign-trained physicians, many of whom have passed rigorous exams like the USMLE, completed their residencies and years of clinical training abroad, remain unable to practice due to regulatory barriers. Last week, a Middle Eastern immigrant doctor, Ali, who drove me to D.C., shared that despite 23 years of experience as a general practitioner in his home country, he was forced to leave medicine entirely because he could not afford to redo his residency. Instead, he now works in construction and drives for Uber part-time. He is not alone—there is a huge percentage of ITPs in the U.S. who never return to clinical practice, despite holding M.D.s and extensive experience. A recent study found that among former immigrant physicians not on track for relicensure, 77% held M.D. degrees yet were working outside of healthcare¹.

This bill offers a practical solution by allowing qualified ITPs to fill critical gaps in Maryland's healthcare system. Other states, including Florida, Virginia, and Illinois, have successfully implemented similar programs, demonstrating that ITPs can safely and effectively integrate into the workforce. To ensure a smooth transition, Maryland could introduce short-term cultural competency training, but the notion that foreign-trained physicians need to prove their ability beyond the existing credentialing system is unnecessary. These professionals have already demonstrated their competence through rigorous training, board exams, and years of clinical experience.

I urge the committee to support HB 1199 to help bridge Maryland's healthcare workforce gap and provide quality care to communities in need. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I welcome any questions you may have.

¹ https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2024/occupational-licensing-can-detour-immigrant-physicians-career-paths?utm_source=chatgpt.com#_ftn3