



World Education Services Statement of Support for HB979

HB979 would create a provisional teaching license for internationally licensed educators in Virginia. This legislation would create a more vibrant economy and address workforce shortages by ensuring that immigrants and refugees in the state have access to educational and career pathways—especially in high-demand fields like education.

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in the United States and Canada. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation. Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. WES' philanthropic arm, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, supports catalytic leaders and organizations working to build inclusive economies and to ensure that immigrants and refugees can achieve their aspirations and thrive.

Virginia is home to **321,000** college-educated immigrants and refugees, yet **21.5 percent** of these individuals are unemployed or underemployed due to systemic barriers including limited recognition of international credentials.¹ At the same time, the number of unfilled teaching positions in the state has grown by **62 percent** over the last three years, according to data from the Virginia Department of Education.² Last August, 76 of Virginia's 132 districts reported a total of nearly **5,000** educator vacancies.³

The need is clear: Virginia must ensure that immigrants and refugees who hold international teaching credentials have equitable opportunities to join the state's workforce. In advancing HB979, Virginia has an opportunity to create teaching licensing pathways, promote more inclusive teacher workforces, and **improve student attendance** and outcomes.⁴

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement of support.

¹ "U.S. Data Tool: Interactive Resource Featuring National and State Level Workforce Data on Immigrant Skill Underutilization," World Education Services, October 11, 2021, <https://www.wes.org/partners/global-talent-bridge/u-s-data-tool-interactive-resource-featuring-national-and-state-level-workforce-data-on-immigrant-skill-underutilization/>.

² Kate Masters, "Virginia Teacher Shortages Spiked during the Pandemic. Experts Are Worried about What's to Come.," Virginia Mercury, December 6, 2021, <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2021/12/06/virginia-teacher-shortages-spiked-during-the-pandemic-experts-are-worried-about-whats-to-come/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David Figlio, "The Importance of a Diverse Teaching Force," The Brookings Institution, August 20, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-importance-of-a-diverse-teaching-force/>.