



REFUGEE PHYSICIANS ADVOCACY (RPA)
COALITION
DMV CAREER MENTORING & ADVOCACY

**The Refugee Physicians Advocacy (RPA) Coalition
Supports HB995 “Temporary Licensure of Foreign Licensed Physicians.” (Del. Tran)**

Status: Assigned to Virginia House Health & Human Services
Subcommittee: Health Professions on Jan 19
Committee Meets Thursday mornings

House Bill995 creates a pathway for qualified doctors licensed overseas to fill workforce gaps in medically underserved communities. These gaps existed before and were exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Foreign trained doctors, also known as **International Medical Graduates (IMGs)** are a ready and untapped workforce with medical and language skills and cultural sensitivities needed to serve communities throughout the Commonwealth.

There is no doubt that Virginia is facing a healthcare workforce crisis. A RAND report commissioned by the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority notes that “Virginia, like the U.S. as a whole, faces a significant shortage of healthcare workers,¹” especially in primary care and behavioral health, with shortfalls projected to increase as the population ages.

In addition to shortages, there is a mismatch of talent. Rural communities, immigrant communities, and communities of color are served by an aging medical workforce that lacks the diversity to best serve their populations. According to pre-COVID estimates, 270,000 under-utilized foreign trained health workers are ready and available to serve. Accessing this workforce would go a long way toward addressing the shortage of 122,000 physicians the U.S. is expected to face by 2032.²

Virginia must compete with states that already have programs to attract IMGs. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) recognizes workforce development shortages, including in healthcare, as among the top priorities of state legislatures in both 2023 and 2024.³ Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Washington and neighboring Tennessee have all passed legislation to license IMGs. At least 10 other states are considering such legislation this year. In its first month, the Washington state program had 40 IMGs submit applications for their program.⁴

¹ RAND Research Brief, “Recommendations for Strengthening the Health Care Workforce in the Virginia Health and Workforce in the Commonwealth of Virginia,” Megan Andrew et.al, Nov 2023
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA2903-1.html

² Migration Policy Institute, “Looking Beyond COVID-19, Untapped Pool of Immigration Health Care Workers Could Play Role Addressing Immediate and Long-Term U.S. Health Needs, Apr 29, 2021,
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/beyond-covid19-untapped-role-immigrant-health-care-workers>

³ National Conference of State Legislatures, “Hottest Topic for 2024? Workforce Still Top of Mind for States,” Lesley Kennedy, Dec 5, 2023.

<https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/hottest-topic-for-2024-workforce-still-top-of-mind-for-states>

⁴ Time Magazine, “Innovative Washington Law Aims to Get Foreign-Trained Doctors Back in Hospitals,” Law, Tara, Oct 11, 2021, <https://time.com/6105532/foreign-trained-doctors/>

How it works: HB995 takes the best of other state efforts and creates a Virginia-specific solution. The bill empowers Virginia's Board of Medicine to issue two-year provisional licenses to qualified IMGs. The licensure is renewable for two additional years if the physician practices in a medically underserved area. Only doctors who successfully complete these four years of practice may apply for full licensure. To enter into the program, qualifying doctors will have practiced medicine overseas for at least five years after being appropriately licensed and certified; and will have passed the US Medical Licensing Exam Steps 1 and 2.

HB995 is a solution to a structural problem: the residency ceiling. Applying for residency is a multi-thousand dollar investment out of reach for most IMGs. For the rare IMG able to make that investment, 40% never match, compared to a 94% acceptance rate among U.S. trained medical students. This is not a reflection of skills. In fact, most IMGs bring years more experience but face a system geared toward newly minted doctors.⁵

Getting to know Virginia's IMG population. RPA has interviewed 39 talented IMGs who have recently come to Virginia from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Congo, Cameroon and other countries. Despite significant expertise across a wide range of disciplines, most of these doctors work in low wage jobs outside the health industry. RPA has also identified IMGs who have resided in Virginia for decades and were unable to ever return to medicine.

HB995 has garnered wide support across the Virginia health sector, including endorsements from: the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association, the Virginia Medical Society, the Virginia Association of Free Clinics, the Virginia Community Healthcare Association, Virginia Association of Free Clinics, and Church World Services. RPA proudly joins this coalition on behalf of our coalition partners and our founding organizations, Georgetown University School of Medicine, Northern Virginia Friends of Refugees, and Their Story is Our Story.

Now is the time and HB995 is the legislation that will allow these talented professionals to provide high quality support to patients, especially in underserved communities, and improve access to needed medical care.

⁵ Ibid.

RPA is a coalition of nonprofits led by Georgetown University School of Medicine, NOVA Friends of Refugees, and [Their Story is Our Story](#).

We assist refugee physicians in the DMV region to continue their careers through mentorship, streamlined upskilling, legislative and regulatory change, and grants.

We are proud to have the support of numerous partner organizations who have endorsed HB995 (listed alphabetically): Afghan Medical Professionals Association of America (AMPAA), American Immigration Council, Church World Services (CWS) Virginia, Dar Al-Hijra, Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), FAMIL, Hampton Roads Refugee Relief (HR3), International Rescue Committee (IRC) - Charlottesville, Richmond; Just Neighbors, Lutheran Social Services National Capital Area (LSSNCA), Mason & Partners (MAP) Clinic, Mozaic DMV, Northern Virginia Coalition for Refugee Wellness (NOVACRW), Northern Virginia Friends of Refugees, REACT DC, ReEstablish Richmond, Refugee Advocacy Lab, Talent Beyond Boundaries, The International Medical Graduate Academy (TIMGA), Upwardly Global, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Virginia United Methodist Church - Board of Church and Society & Refugee Response, Women for Afghan Women, World Education Services (WES).