



*January 31, 2024*

*To: Chair Prince and Members of the House Health and Human Services Sub-Committee: Health Professionals*

*From: Victoria Francis, Deputy Director, State & Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council*

***RE: HB. 995: Medicine, Board of; temporary licensure of physicians licensed in a foreign country***

Dear Chair Prince and members of the committee,

My name is Victoria Francis, and I am the Deputy Director of State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council (the Council), an organization that works to advance positive public attitudes toward immigrants 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 submitting this letter to express the Council's support for removing barriers that keep qualified Virginians from contributing to the state's healthcare workforce. To this end, I respectfully encourage the passage of HB 995, which would expand pathways to practice for international medical graduates (IMGs) seeking to enter the state's workforce and reduce barriers to career advancement for Virginians.

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 in some of the fastest-growing and most in-demand fields, including healthcare. In order to remain competitive and meet critical workforce shortages, Virginia 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 immigrants and refugees already living in the state. HB. 995 does just that by expanding access to licenses to qualified internationally trained physicians, thereby increasing economic opportunities for all residents and helping to meet the state's healthcare workforce needs.

To help illustrate why this measure is so important and why it makes sense to reduce barriers for all qualified Virginians, including physicians, my organization has conducted quantitative research on the impact immigrants and refugees already have on the state and the growing demand for healthcare workers in Virginia. What we found is striking.

- **As of 2021, Virginia is home to more than one million immigrants, making up 12.3 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 80.2 percent of immigrant Virginians being of working age (ages 16-64) compared to 62.3 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts and nearly one in five immigrants holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

- Immigrants in Virginia paid \$14.6 billion in taxes — including \$4.6 billion in state and local taxes — and held \$38.2 billion in spending power that can then be reinjected back into the state’s economy.
- **Virginia’s immigrant population is already filling a critical need for healthcare workers.** In 2019, immigrants made up 14.5 percent of Virginia’s healthcare workers — including 28.9 percent of all physicians and surgeons — while making up 12.8 percent of the population.
- **In 2015, long before the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia faced severe physician shortages, with some counties across the state registering zero physicians per 100,000 residents. Projections remain dire.**
  - Virginia is expected to need an additional 1,622 primary care physicians by 2030, significantly impacting the accessibility of healthcare, particularly in rural communities.
  - From 2017 to 2021, Virginia saw a large increase in demand for physician positions. The demand for:
    - Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons increased by 244.0 percent
    - Podiatrists increased by 118.2 percent
    - Obstetricians and Gynecologists increased by 107.5 percent
    - General Internal Medicine Physicians increased by 79.7 percent
    - Anesthesiologists increased by 37.2 percent
    - Surgeons, Except Ophthalmologists, increased by 34.8 percent

As more Virginians reach retirement age and the state’s healthcare sector continues to face workforce shortages, retaining and leveraging internationally trained physicians is critical. Several states, including Washington, California, Colorado, Maine, and Tennessee, have taken steps to reduce barriers to professional and occupational licenses for physicians. Virginia 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 995.

Thank you for your consideration,

Victoria Francis  
Deputy Director, State & Local Initiatives  
American Immigration Council