

March 15, 2022

Representative Tanya Vyhovsky (VT-36)
State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

RE: H.661: An act relating to licensure of mental health professionals

Dear Representative Vyhovsky:

On behalf of the Refugee Advocacy Lab, I write in support of *H.661 an act relating to licensure of mental health professionals*. In addressing the need to increase the number of mental health professionals in the state, you have acknowledged and aim to rectify the particular barriers faced by refugees and new Americans who wish to enter the profession.

The Refugee Advocacy Lab is an initiative hosted at Refugees International and co-founded with the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Refugee Congress. We collaborate with a wide range of partners who power our work. Our mission is to grow the diverse constituency for U.S. leadership on refugee protection. We do so by building partnerships, supporting inclusive policies, and developing communications products for the common good.

The inclusion of refugees and new Americans in *H.661* reflects what our communities witness everyday; that refugees and new Americans are vital to our shared prosperity. There are nearly 2 million highly skilled immigrants living in the United States who are underutilized or unemployed.¹ Annually, this brain waste costs billions of dollars in forgone earnings and tax payments at the federal, state, and local levels. It is estimated that underemployed immigrants have the potential to earn \$39.4 billion more annually, resulting in \$7.2 billion in taxes at the federal level, and billions at the state and local level. This measure would not only address challenges in entering the field, but also acknowledges the urgent need for cultural competency in mental health service provision.

This measure is important for Vermont's economy and the mental health of all Vermonters. We support *H.661: an act relating to licensure of mental health professionals* and thank you for including special attention to study barriers faced by refugees and new americans.

Sincerely,

Genevieve Kessler
State Strategic Lead
Refugee Advocacy Lab

¹ Untapped Talent: Report in Brief
The Costs of Brain Waste Among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States, https://knowledge.wes.org/rs/317-CTM-316/images/WES_NAE_MPI_Cost_of_Brain_Waste_Policy_Brief.pdf?aiid=51593061