

Bill Introduction: H.606

House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon, Committee. For the record, my name is Representative Esme Cole of Hartford. Thank you for your consideration of H.606—a bill which would reduce barriers to professional licensure in Vermont. This bill aims to address Vermont's shrinking workforce and to maximize our state's economic potential by employing professionals in the occupations that best align with their skills and training, regardless of immigration status.

H.606 would not in any way alter skills-based requirements for licensure. The main provision in this bill is that an applicant may choose to provide a federal employer identification number, an individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN), or a social security number on each occasion required by state law. All three of these forms of tax identification allow employees to contribute their skills to the workforce and pay income-based taxes.

The timing of this bill aligns favorably with a change at the federal level. On January 19th of this year, the IRS began using a modernized, electronic application process for ITINs. Prior to this implementation, applicants had to submit critical documentation by postal mail and ran the risk of being without it for weeks. This new system will expedite the process and make this form of tax identification more tenable for many. The update could generate a new pool of eligible participants in our workforce, so long as we accommodate our state-issued application materials accordingly.

Vermont has already enjoyed the benefits of a trial implementation of this policy. In the face of a drastic nursing shortage, the Office of Professional Regulation took the initiative to expand access to the nursing profession regardless of immigration status. This policy choice may have very well saved lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. H.606 would expand similar benefits to

1. Kavet, Rockler & Associates, LLC. *January 2024 Economic Review and Revenue Forecast*, Economic and Public Policy Consulting, 18 Jan. 2024, jfo.vermont.gov/assets/Subjects/Consensus-Revenue-Forecasts-Legislative-Economic-Outlook/af1507f79a/Commentary-0124-final.pdf
2. Green Mountain Care Board. "Revised Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan." *Revised Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan* | Green Mountain Care Board, 15 Oct. 2021, gmcboard.vermont.gov/document/revised-health-care-workforce-strategic-plan.
3. Green Mountain Care Board. *Vermont Health Care Workforce Report*, 2019, gmcboard.vermont.gov/sites/gmcb/files/documents/Workforce_2019_draft%20final.pdf.

other jobs in healthcare and beyond in dire need of qualified staff—from radiologic technicians, to social workers, foresters, substance misuse counselors, CDL drivers, barbers, et cetera.

According to the Joint Fiscal Office, Vermont has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. In 2023 the number of job openings exceeded the number of unemployed by at least 12,000.¹ The Green Mountain Care Board has issued reports to highlight that healthcare professions make up a significant portion of these vacancies.^{2,3} These vacancies have severe implications on our economy, tax base, quality of care, and burnout.² To combat this, JFO states that "there are actions that could be taken to accept, welcome and help transition foreign-born families and workers that may be affordable - and could make a difference."¹

Ten states have implemented some form of this policy already, and I hope that Vermont will follow suit.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to continuing the conversation.

1. Kavet, Rockler & Associates, LLC. *January 2024 Economic Review and Revenue Forecast*, Economic and Public Policy Consulting, 18 Jan. 2024, jfo.vermont.gov/assets/Subjects/Consensus-Revenue-Forecasts-Legislative-Economic-Outlook/af1507f79a/Commentary-0124-final.pdf
2. Green Mountain Care Board. "Revised Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan." *Revised Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan* | *Green Mountain Care Board*, 15 Oct. 2021, gmcbboard.vermont.gov/document/revised-health-care-workforce-strategic-plan.
3. Green Mountain Care Board. *Vermont Health Care Workforce Report*, 2019, gmcbboard.vermont.gov/sites/gmcb/files/documents/Workforce_2019_draft%20final.pdf.