

My name is Ian Hefele and I am the Community Engagement Manager at the Ethiopian Community Development Council in Brattleboro. Thank you for having me here today. Southern Vermont is now a permanent refugee resettlement site and we are expecting 150+ refugees from 8 different countries in Brattleboro alone – including a further 75 in Bennington, our sister site. As we are diversifying our population in Southern Vermont, we need to apply that same principle to our service providers as well. African clients currently drive to Springfield, MA or Albany, NY just to get their hair done in a culturally appropriate manner as there is no professional, licensed hairdresser who is accustomed to African hair care in Southern Vermont. Helping certify cosmetology students to practice here in the region would keep jobs and clients local, injecting that money right back into the economy. 3 of our initial refugees were medical students in their home countries who had to interrupt their studies due to forced migration. One client, who was a midwife back in her home country, has now finished her LNA and is employed locally –adding taxable income to the region. As more refugees come into the region, we will need more culturally competent service providers in the medical field, in our schools, in our licensed shops, or new CDL drivers on the road. This bill will, if passed, help facilitate links between the host community’s culture and the refugees. It will also develop a place for our new Vermonters to connect with services in their own language. We know that Vermont has a workforce problem, and helping to license our clients will alleviate the wait times in medical offices, schools with proper ELL support, and at the same time provide gainful employment opportunities in the region. One thing to note, this bill should include means for ELL support to make it truly equitable. Access to licensure is a great step forward but will not be obtainable to clients who have limited or no English when they arrive in the USA. Vermont has a population of dedicated people ready to enter the workforce and it is our duty to help them do so.

Stay well,

Ian Hefele (he/his/him)

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