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S.142 Relicensing Bill - Testimony: House Committee on Health Care

Dear House Committee on Health Care:

I write you in support of S.142 and advocate for qualified internationally trained physicians to use the supervisory model pathway to return to practice in Vermont hospitals, FQHCs and community health centers where they are most needed. I represent the Windham County NAACP Health Justice Committee and these are our desired outcomes:

- Reduction of Vermont health care workforce shortages
- Creation of clear pathways for internationally trained physicians currently in Vermont or the US to enter our local health care workforce
- Increase culturally sensitive medical practice through supporting more diversity in our healthcare work force

Please note going forward, as recommended by the Advisory Commission on Additional Licensing Models of the Federation of State Medical Boards, we are using the term Internationally Trained Physicians – ITPs – in place of IMGs.

During 2025, we spread the word about the S.142 bill on social media to internationally trained physicians (ITPs) living in Vermont and nearby states. We received 23 responses. Sixteen of the 23 agreed to one hour interviews which educated us about their hopes and challenges for re-licensing. Those interviewed came from Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo(DRC), Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago and Canada. Thirteen of the sixteen interviewed live in Vermont; the additional three would move to Vermont if the pathway is implemented. All were in full support of the bill. However, the bill's requirements on recency and length of practice are a significant challenge. Only four of the sixteen presently meet the 'three out of the last five years' stipulation. By the time they successfully take their required USMLE 1 & 2 exams, none of them will be eligible.

The “three out of the past five years” restriction has become a significant barrier limiting access to highly skilled ITPs who are ready to serve. Learning from states in our region which have implemented similar bills with longer recency provisions leads us to propose changing the existing language to “at least one year of practice within the past seven years”.

No ITP applicant can access this pathway without an offer of employment from a hospital, FQHC or community health center in Vermont. **Recent interviews with six Vermont hospital CEOs revealed their serious concerns about the unnecessary barriers the recency and length of**

practice requirement proposed in the Vermont bill present. These barriers limit their ability to attract and retain ITPs to serve Vermonters. They strive to attract talent within Vermont and across state lines. Each institution's emphasis on patient safety ensures strong guardrails in the hiring process. They are willing to testify to propose more equitable guidelines to allow capable internationally trained physicians to join their medical teams. Changing the provision on recency would give hiring entities access to a larger pool of talent. I add a note of appreciation to Rep. Berbeco for participating in these CEO interviews.

ITPs in Vermont are ready, willing and able to serve patients in Vermont. Five of the sixteen ITPs interviewed have prepared brief written testimony which we attach to this letter.

In closing, we share our brief presentation from the 2025 UVM Health Equity Summit entitled "Bridging the Gap: Integrating ITPs into Vermont Healthcare Workforce" – it summarizes the disconnect we witnessed through these ITP interviews: the significant loss of primary care physicians in Vermont vs. this untapped pool of ITPs who hope to relicense.

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The Windham County NAACP is in full support of the new amendment to the bill. Along with other Vermont stakeholders, we welcome the opportunity to engage and learn from other states which have implemented similar pathways.

Here are the five ITP anonymous testimonies. Thank you for your consideration of these life experiences and concerns as you review and hopefully pass S.142.

Sincerely,

Diana Wahle, Chair, Windham County NAACP Health Justice Committee

TESTIMONIES FROM 5 INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED PHYSICIANS HOPING TO LICENSE IN VERMONT:

1. Dr. B.F. Afghanistan Age 29

Medical Specialty: General Practitioner **Education:** Zawul Institute of Higher Education Faculty of Medicine, MD 2021

Practice 2021-2024 Faqirzada Clinic (Takhar Province, Afghanistan) 2024 Omid Complex Hospital (Pakistan)

Over this three year period it is estimated I treated over 3600 patients each year.

- General practitioner and versatile provider, contributing to cardiology diagnostics, sonography, ECG interpretation, prescription medication and laboratory management.
- Interpreted diagnostic tests, including laboratory analyses, X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs.
- Managed Patients: Chronic diseases and seasonal illnesses such as respiratory infections, in addition to a wide range of medical diagnoses ranging from cardiac, gastrointestinal diseases, and dermatological conditions.

USMLE Preparation: Presently studying for USMLE 1 exam

VISA Status: P2 Asylum 5 year work permit, Green Card Applicant

ECFMG: applying for certification

Languages: Dari, English, Farsi (Persian), Pashto

U.S. Employment: Brattleboro Memorial Hospital Phlebotomist

Residence: Brattleboro, VT

My Aspiration My dream is to go through the S.142 supervisory model, gain a physician's license and work as a primary care physician serving Vermonters of all ages.

My Challenges I have a medical degree from Afghanistan and am an experienced primary care practitioner. I am striving to satisfy those requirements for medical licensure in Vermont, however existing pathways are time consuming and expensive. My family in Afghanistan and Pakistan require my financial support. Understanding the Vermont regulatory system and navigating the array of potential resources has been very challenging. I fully support S.142 to develop a smoother pathway.

With limited time and financial resources, I am lucky to have found an online USMLE Support Group as I begin to study for the USMLE 1. I happened to connect with this online group through a friend.

2. Dr. MG, Egypt age 41
Medical Specialty: Obstetrics and Gynecology

Education: Graduated with honors from Cairo University School of Medicine (2008); completed my residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Cairo University and later completed a PhD. (2022)

Career Highlights: Cairo University Hospital – Resident in Dept. of Gynecology (2009-2012); Resident with Ministry of Health Hospitals in Cairo (2012-2018). Researcher of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the National Research Center. Completed research in Tokyo (April 2018-April 2021), focusing on embryo implantation and factors affecting recurrent implantation failure. I also worked there on a project related to Asherman's syndrome and endometrial adhesions. Back in Egypt, I practiced from 2021-2024.

USMLE Preparation: Goal to successfully pass Step 1: 2026 and Step 2: 2028

U.S. Employment: In November 2024, began a postdoctoral associate position at the University of Vermont in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences.

Languages: Arabic, English

Visa Status: J1 (2 year exemption approved)

Residence: Chittenden County, Vermont

Short Testimony Quote: Commitment to providing healthcare to all, particularly women. I strive to balance my career going forward with research and practicing medicine in a clinic. I would use S.142 to license as a primary care provider.

I am well trained in the field: I helped in the delivery of thousands of pregnant women including vaginal and C-Sections, either single or twin pregnancies. And I dealt with many complications and high risk cases. Also I performed hysterectomies, oophorectomies and ovarian cystectomies as well as minor operations including uterine curettage. In addition, I managed outpatient clinics for Ante Natal Care, gynecology, and infertility I have the talent to understand women's needs and am glad to alleviate their suffering. I have extensive experience both in clinical and research aspects related to my field. My research work at UVM is full-time and I have recently published one research paper in the *Histochemistry and Cell Biology* journal. I am presently working on a second research paper. It would be impossible for me without this bill to license as a primary care provider in Vermont due to my age and the time USMLE studies require. I have been advised by some Egyptian friends who recently passed these tests and have given me advice and some study materials which has been a great help. My dedicated goal is to license as a doctor in Vermont.

3. Dr. AS, Democratic Republic of Congo

Medical Specialty: Neurosurgery & General Practice

Education: Master's degree in Neurosurgery from the University of Zimbabwe MD 2017

Career Highlights: My training, supported by the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies, allowed me to master advanced neurosurgical techniques. After completing my five year residency in Zimbabwe, I pursued further specialization in France, gaining valuable experience in cutting-edge neurosurgical procedures.

Specialist Consultant in Neurosurgery in the University of Zimbabwe Medical School 2017-present

USMLE Preparation: in process

Visa Status: Green Card

U.S. Employment: Medical Interpreter

Languages: English, French (France), Kinyarwanda, Swahili

Residence: Essex Junction, VT

Testimony Quote:

My aspirations: I want to express my strong interest in providing healthcare to refugees, immigrants, asylees, and other marginalized populations in Vermont. If I were licensed to practice as a general practitioner in Vermont, it would significantly impact my personal and professional goals. I recognize that the population in Vermont is aging, which brings unique health challenges. My goal is always to ensure my patients leave satisfied and eager to return to

my practice. I want to contribute positively to my community, understanding that there is a critical need for doctors here. I hope to see this bill pass so that I can fulfill my part in serving our community.

My Challenges: I have over 20 years of experience as a doctor. My background has equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and address the unique health challenges faced by my community, but I am currently unable to practice medicine.

I currently work part-time as a medical translator, assisting immigrants and refugees who struggle with language in medical settings. This role allows me to contribute to my community, but it's a small step toward my ultimate goal of practicing medicine again. As a translator, I often meet individuals when they attend medical appointments. Many of them struggle to express themselves, having spent years in refugee camps, which can lead to feelings of depression. I assist them in navigating the healthcare system. Most of my translation work comes from hospital requests, where I help clients understand medical terminology and communicate their needs. On the side I often inform doctors about cultural backgrounds that may influence the patient's health. I find fulfillment in supporting them, even in this limited capacity.

As I study for the USMLE, I hope to contribute as a licensed physician to the Vermont healthcare system.

4. Dr. PS, Democratic Republic of Congo, age 41

Medical Specialty: General Practitioner

Education: Catholic University of Graben in the DRC General Practice MD and Medical Doctorate in Surgery (2008), Master's Degree in Public Health (2022) from the University of South Wales, UK

Career Highlights in DRC and Swaziland:

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Luvika Medical Surgical Center in Butembo (2009-2010)

Swaziland: Good Shepherd Hospital (2010) Cabrini Ministry NGO Clinic (2010-2012)

General Practitioner responsibilities in both countries:

- Internal medicine, managed patients with hypertension, diabetes, and other communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- Minor and major surgery.
- In the outpatient department and hospital wards, responsible for diagnosing conditions, ordering and interpreting examinations, and ensuring proper patient follow-up.
- In maternity care, managed prenatal and postnatal care, overseeing both normal and cesarean deliveries. Pediatric care and management of childhood diseases.

Ministry of Health Sthobela Hospital – Lubumbo Region (2012 to 2020) Head of the HIV and TB department, supervising ten clinics. (2020-2022) Appointed clinical lead for COVID-19 management at the main hospital. (2022-2024) Manzini Government Hospital – Senior Medical Officer assisting cancer patients

USMLE Preparation: Beginning to study for USMLE #1

U.S. Employment: Collaborative Solutions Rehab/Second Spring North – Recovery Support Specialist - Long-term recovery residence in Richmond VT for people seeking treatment for mental health and co-occurring disorders. I support patients to become independent again, supporting medication management prescribed by their physician, securing employment and housing.

Languages: English, French (France), Swahili

Residence: Chittenden County Vermont

Visa Status: Asylum Seeker with Work Permit

Testimony Quote:

I hope to do what I love the most as a primary care physician in a hospital setting. As soon as possible, I want to license in Vermont so I can once again practice. I am in full support of the Vermont bill S.142 to help me regain my former profession. In my present position supporting patients recovering from addictions, I can identify their medical issues, but I can't go further to help resolve them. I have the knowledge to do so much more but in this country no value is placed on my past education and experience.

Recently I have certified as a Medical Interpreter with AALV. I am assigned to assist patients in meetings with their doctors who require French or Swahili interpretation.

My priority is to begin studying for the first USMLE so that I can once again become a doctor and serve Vermont.

5. Dr. JW, Democratic Republic of Congo age 47

Medical Specialty: General Practice & Ophthalmology

Education: University of Lubumbashi (2008) Medical Degree and Master Degree of Public Health at University of Vermont Class 2019 (June).

Career Highlights: His diverse medical experience reflects a deep commitment to providing essential healthcare services in underserved areas.

2008 -2010 Practiced as a primary care physician in rural areas, performing critical procedures such as cesarean sections, hernia repairs, and managing occlusions.

2010-2012 Secured a scholarship for a two-year ophthalmology residency, specializing in cataract surgeries. Performed 50 surgeries before obtaining certification as a cataract surgeon, making him a certified specialist across Central Africa.

2013 - 2019 In the U.S his educational path included intensive English studies and a graduate certificate program in disability studies at the University of Vermont (UVM: 2017). He later earned a master's degree in Public Health from UVM in 2019, deepening his understanding of the American healthcare system and public health strategies, Global health, Climate change.

U.S. Employment: Professionally, he has worked in various healthcare roles, including as a caregiver, medication technician, and in Vermont's assisted living facilities. Despite his extensive qualifications, his attempts to secure roles aligning with his expertise have been difficult. His pursuit of positions at the Vermont Department of Health were unsuccessful.

Languages: English, French (France), Swahili, Lingala

Residence: Burlington Vermont

Immigration Status: U.S. Citizen

Short Testimony Quote: During the COVID-19 pandemic, he created a community radio show to provide public health education for immigrants which continues today. This initiative expanded to include a monthly television program through CCTV, further broadening access to crucial health information. His media influence and expertise in immigrant health issues led him to a part time job with the City of Burlington's REIB (Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) as a member of the Trusted Community Voices (TCV) team, which serves as a bridge between the municipal government and immigrant populations in Burlington from countries such as Bhutan, Vietnam, Congo, and Somalia.

Since 2018, he has also been affiliated with the Larner School of Medicine at the University of Vermont (UVM), where he educates third-year medical students on cultural competency and the unique healthcare challenges faced by immigrant communities. He has been invited annually to share his expertise with all medical students, helping to improve the effectiveness of medical services for diverse populations. He is also a Founder and the Executive Director of New Americans Public Health Initiative/NAPHI which the mission is to address health disparities by providing programs and services to New Americans, to increase awareness of chronic diseases, to educate community members in disease prevention and management.

In closing, he wishes this bill had been in place when he arrived in Vermont many years ago. He fully supports the bill.

