



**To:** House Committee on Judiciary  
**From:** Jessa Barnard, Executive Director  
**Date:** April 2, 2026  
**RE:** Support for S. 209

**The Vermont Medical Society** is the largest physician membership organization in the state, representing over 3,100 physicians, physician assistants and medical students across all specialties and geographic locations. Thank you for taking up S. 209 and considering the importance of protecting access to health care practices – both as spaces where patients seek life saving services, and where employees need to be able to show up for work.

In January, as reports began emerging from health care professionals around the country regarding the impact of immigration enforcement activity on patient health and wellbeing, the Vermont Medical Society, American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Vermont, American College of Physicians Vermont, Vermont Psychiatric Association and the Vermont Academy of Family Physicians issued a joint statement regarding the impact of immigration enforcement activities on access to health care. Not only is enforcement occurring in and around health care settings, including hospitals, emergency departments, and community practices, but fear among immigrant communities is preventing individuals from leaving their homes to attend medical appointments, work, school and obtain needed food and medicine. Our full statement can be found [here](#).

A family physician, Michelle Dorwart, MD, MPH, who was unable to be here today to testify, shared the following story regarding the importance of S. 209:

*In my practice, we have been caring for refugees and other newcomers for decades. We have worked to help people feel welcome, providing care for their physical and mental health, social support, and a connection to their new community. In the context of the recent escalation in ICE activity, many patients report feeling fearful of leaving their homes. One recent example is a patient whose ophthalmologist saw signs of ocular cancer and recommended consultation with an ocular ophthalmologist (which meant the patient would have to travel outside of Vermont as such a specialist is not available in the state); the patient was very fearful of traveling for care and declined to go. This could mean a delay in cancer diagnosis and potential progression of eye cancer with serious risks to their vision and even their life. Many people are delaying seeking medical care because of concerns about being targeted by immigration enforcement on the basis of their skin color or their accent. Additionally, individuals commonly report that, whereas they previously worked multiple jobs to support their families, they are now working only one job so that they do not have to be outside their homes at night.*

*Legislation to protect people from arrest when seeking medical care in Vermont will be a meaningful step toward supporting our communities and helping our neighbors feel safer as they meet their medical needs and limit or avoid costly complications and disease progression.*

Thank you again for considering S. 209 and protecting access to necessary health care services.