



February 28, 2023 – Testimony in support of Senate Bill 849

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business

From: Rich André, Senior Policy Advisor, State & Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, members of the committee,

My name is Rich André and I am the Senior Policy Advisor for State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council. The Council works to create a more welcoming country — one that provides a fair and humane immigration system and adopts policies to take into account the vital contributions that immigrants and refugees make to the U.S. economy and society.

I am testifying to express support for removing barriers that keep qualified Oregonians from accessing professional and occupational licenses. To this end, I respectfully encourage the passage of SB 849 with the -1 amendment.

My organization has worked with leaders in government, business, and civil society across the country to recognize the crucial role immigrants and refugees are playing in state and local economies. This includes some of the fastest-growing and most in-demand fields like healthcare, education, and social work. Despite the growing need for workers, many immigrants and refugees who have received specialized education, training, and licensing abroad are unable to practice in Oregon, facing challenges such as re-credentialing and language proficiency.

In order to remain competitive and address critical labor shortages, Oregon will need to implement policies that not only attract and retain immigrant and refugee talent that complements the U.S.-born workforce, but also build career pathways for those already living in the state. SB 849 with the -1 amendment would help achieve this goal.

To help illustrate why this measure is so important, and why it makes sense to reduce barriers to licensure for all qualified Oregonians, my organization has conducted quantitative research on the impact immigrants and refugees already have in the state. According to American Immigration Council analysis of 2019 American Community Survey and Lightcast Labor Insights data:

- **Oregon is going to need more workers to complement the U.S.-born workforce**, which is facing increasingly critical shortages as the state's population ages. With 1.3 million Oregonians approaching retirement age in the next decade, fewer Americans are left in the workforce as a result.
- **In 2019, Oregon was home to more than 415,000 immigrants and refugees, making up 12.4 percent of the state's workforce despite comprising just 9.9 percent of its population.** These new Americans are critical to addressing the state's workforce shortages across the skills and



education spectrum, with 80.0 percent of immigrant and refugee Oregonians being of working age (ages 16-64) compared to 62.0 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts, and one in five holds a bachelor's degree or higher.

- **Oregon has a growing demand for healthcare workers, educators, and social workers, all key fields with occupations that can require certificates or occupational or professional licenses.**
 - **From 2018 to 2022, Oregon saw a large increase in demand for healthcare positions.** The demand for licensed practical nurses (LPNs) increased by 97.7 percent, dentists increased by 40.0 percent, and registered nurses increased by 9.9 percent.
 - **During the same period, job postings for elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers also increased.** The demand for middle school teachers increased by 67.0 percent and teaching assistants increased by 53.7 percent.
 - **The need for social workers has also become apparent.** Job postings for social workers and mental health social workers increased 112.4 percent and 442.9 percent, respectively, between 2018 and 2022.
- **As the state has seen an increase in demand for multilingual and culturally competent employees, internationally-trained professionals are uniquely positioned to provide support across all industries.**
 - From 2018 to 2022, the number of online job postings that requested bilingual skills increased by 62.7 percent for healthcare practitioners, 116.3 percent for social work and counseling occupations, and 101.7 percent for K-12 teachers and educational support workers (such as teaching assistants and tutors).
- **Despite barriers to entry, immigrants and refugees are already helping fill critical workforce shortages.** The Council's research found that from 2015 to 2019, on average, 5.9 percent of those employed as registered nurses, 6.8 percent of workers in educational professions (elementary, middle, and secondary school), and more than one in ten social workers were born outside of the United States.
- **Oregon has an opportunity to tackle the skills mismatch, known as brain waste.** The Council's analysis shows that more than 32.0 percent of the state's immigrants and refugees are college-educated workers employed in occupations that do not require a bachelor's degree.

As Oregon aims to address its workforce challenges, it is critical to retain immigrant and refugee talent already in the state. More than a dozen states have taken similar steps to reduce barriers to professional and occupational licenses, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Nevada. Oregon is in a position to take decisive action to leverage the skills of the state's future workforce. I encourage the Committee to support the passage of SB 849 with the -1 amendment.

Thank you for your consideration,



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