

To: Honorable Members of the House Health & Insurance Committee

From: Hala Alyasiri

Date: February 9, 2022

Re: Support for HB22-1050 (International Medical Graduate Integrate Health-care Workforce)

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Hala Alyasiri now I live in Washington State. I am a mother of a wonderful four year old boy as I am also an International Medical Graduate (IMG) who completed medical school in Iraq in 2016. I immigrated to my husband's home state of Colorado with the intention of establishing my career as a physician. Unfortunately, given the limited recognition of my expertise, talent, and dedication to the healthcare field as an IMG, I ultimately found it too challenging to navigate the path to medical licensure in Colorado.

My family relocated to Washington where I co-founded the Washington Academy for IMGs (WAIMG). Our mission is to break down barriers that prevent Washington international medical graduates from accomplishing their professional and medical career goals. WAIMG lifts up the voices of IMGs and facilitates their path to practicing medicine, including providing support to help prepare for the rigorous United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). I am proud to have been part of the coalition that successfully championed Senate Bill 5846, which was signed by Governor Inslee in 2019 to facilitate the integration of international medical graduates into Washington's health care delivery system.

Especially in light of the physician shortage and challenges facing the healthcare system in the pandemic era, I am excited and moved that Colorado is taking similar steps through HB22-1050 to finally better utilize the skills of experienced physicians who've completed their medical training outside the United States or Canada. I can say first hand that IMGs are eager to contribute to Colorado's healthcare workforce and if the programs that will be created under this bill had been introduced sooner, perhaps my family would still call Colorado home.

Thank you for voting YES on HB22-1050.



International Rescue Committee in Denver

1873 S. Bellaire St.
5th Floor
Denver, Colorado, 80222

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

Dear Chair Lontine and members of the Health and Insurance Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of the International Rescue Committee in Denver (IRC) to express our support for HB22-1050: International Medical Graduate Integrate Health-care Workforce.

In Colorado, the IRC is one of three refugee resettlement agencies that partner with the U.S. Department of State and the Colorado Refugee Services Program under the Colorado Department of Human Services to welcome and support individuals who are refugees, Special Immigrant Visa recipients, asylees, and Afghan evacuees who now call Colorado home.

Every day, our team sees the uphill battles our immigrant and refugee clients face to have their skills, training, and education recognized in the U.S. Despite these obstacles, our clients demonstrate fortitude, commitment, and dedication to getting to work, achieving economic self-reliance, and using their skills and talents to contribute to the state that welcomed them. While the skills and expertise of our clients vary, for those with medical backgrounds, not being able to support the healthcare response in their communities during the pandemic has been particularly painful. At the height of the pandemic, the IRC surveyed our national network of resettled clients, and hundreds indicated training and professional expertise in medicine and an urgent desire to support their communities and hospitals. More than 70% indicated a willingness to relocate if it meant they could serve their community and have their skills utilized.

Our clients who trained and practiced as physicians before coming to the U.S. are especially eager to put their skills to work and contribute to Colorado's healthcare workforce. Unfortunately, the barriers to re-licensure are daunting, expensive, and often out of reach for newcomers who frequently end up in positions where their skills are underutilized. Not only is this a significant loss for the individual, but for our community and for the countless Coloradans who struggle to access preventative and ongoing care or to connect with a physician who speaks their language and understands their lived experience.

HB22-1050 is an important step in addressing physician shortages across Colorado and ensuring that all Coloradans have the opportunity to contribute and thrive. Qualified International Medical Graduates in Colorado should have the opportunity to demonstrate that they have the necessary skills to return to their chosen career and practice in our state. Colorado must do more to keep the diverse skills and experience of our immigrant and refugee physicians in our state; without HB22-1050, we will continue to see qualified immigrant and refugee doctors leave the state for opportunities where they can use their skills.

Colorado has a long history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. Part of that commitment includes honoring and uplifting our newest neighbors' rich backgrounds, expertise, and experiences. HB22-1050 does just that. It creates opportunities for qualified International Medical Graduates to demonstrate that their skills meet U.S. standards and that they can play a vital role in ensuring that all Coloradans have access to quality healthcare.

Integrating these professionals is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do for Colorado and will benefit the public health of our communities and our state's economy.

We urge you to support HB22-1050.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victoria Francis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Victoria Francis
State Advocacy Officer
International Rescue Committee in Denver

To: Honorable Members of the House Health & Insurance Committee
From: Muawia Obeid
Date: February 9, 2022
Re: Support for HB22-1050 (International Medical Graduate Integrate Health-care Workforce)

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My wife and I had the chance to immigrate to the United States in 2009 and we took it looking forward to so many promising opportunities for our kids. We're building our family life here in Colorado—working hard and raising two amazing children—yet a big chunk of my livelihood has been misplaced because I was forced to leave behind my career as a medical doctor.

I already had nine years of experience practicing medicine before we moved to the US. I came here eager to transfer my skills to the world-renowned American healthcare workforce, but soon found myself with the prospect of completely starting over to even get my foot in the door. Clinical experience in a US medical residency program could give me the chance to prove myself and learn more about navigating the local healthcare system, yet many institutions don't even consider residency candidates who graduated from medical school more than five years ago. For Colorado programs, that cut-off is as low as two years. I was seven years out from completing medical school when I came here. It makes no sense that applicants fresh out of medical school automatically had better chances than me in the eyes of residency training programs and my additional two years of practical experience essentially counted against me.

By the way, I'm not the only one in my household who has faced restarting an advanced healthcare career from scratch. My wife, with nearly a decade of experience practicing dentistry, had to go through the expensive, time-consuming process of completely repeating dental school—from applications to board exams. Meanwhile, our children are growing and I've worked to care for them and keep food on the table. I've been a phlebotomist and lab technician and career navigator for other International Medical Graduates (IMGs) striving to utilize their professional skills. Now I'm in graduate school for public health. I don't want to leave the healthcare field, but I've heard over and over that my medical training makes me overqualified for the jobs I interview for. I hope having my MPH will open more doors to contributing to our community at the level I've been trying to do since I got here.

I've always said that no one is promised a perfect or even fair life, but the drive to work hard for a better one was instilled in me by my father who did everything he could to support our large family. The COVID crisis has only made it more frustrating to know that expertise among Colorado's IMGs is being overlooked and wasted while the medical system and patients who rely on it suffer due to a shortage of physicians.

Please support HB22-1050 to strengthen Colorado's healthcare workforce by creating improved pathways to medical licensure for highly qualified IMGs who just want the chance to contribute their hard-earned skills to support their families and help the community.

To: Honorable Members of the House Health & Insurance Committee

From: V. Damary Yanes

Date: February 9, 2022

Re: Support for HB22-1050 (International Medical Graduate Integrate Health-care Workforce)

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My family and I moved to Lafayette, Colorado from Honduras in 2015 to seek asylum. Leaving my native country in the name of safety, I left behind several years of medical school training and half a decade of work in the healthcare field. Navigating the pathway as a physician in the U.S. was too difficult with young children, so I've made a tough decision to pursue an alternative career as a nurse instead. Given the impact of the global pandemic and local healthcare workforce shortages, it's an intense time to commit or re-commit to the healthcare field. I feel more passionate than ever about internationally-trained healthcare professionals having the chance to utilize our considerable skills and talents to prevent disease and maintain health in the Colorado community.

Coming from Latin America, I offer valuable perspective and transferable skills within the U.S. healthcare system. As a physician in Honduras, I remember having to take care of 30 patients a day, providing outpatient consultation in a rural health center with few personnel and limited supplies, and treating a range of illnesses in children, adults, and pregnant women. Through it all, I performed my medical tasks with responsibility, honesty, empathy, problem-solving, attention to detail, and considering the best interest of each unique patient. I have experience working with people facing many barriers accessing medical care, so I really understand the importance of inclusion. I try to have an open mind whenever I join a new community, just as I've been thankful to experience acclimating as an immigrant in this country. Being bilingual is an additional asset in connecting with diverse patients and other health personnel to deliver optimal care.

I know I'm not the only Coloradan with international training and experience who is eager to contribute to my full potential in the local healthcare workforce. Among us are many International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who've specifically completed medical school outside the U.S. or Canada and even practiced medicine extensively in another country and are poised to fully establish their livelihoods here. HB22-1050 is so important because it is designed to help Colorado's healthcare workforce tap into these currently undervalued and underutilized—yet invaluable—resources. Ultimately, this will benefit the entire healthcare system and all Coloradans.

Thank you for your consideration and I appreciate you voting to approve HB22-1050.



World Education Services Statement of Support for HB 1050

HB 1050 advances the inclusion of internationally trained physicians, or international medical graduates (IMGs), in Colorado's health care workforce, addressing the state's growing shortage of physicians. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing strains on Colorado's health care system, with two-thirds of the state's 64 counties currently reporting primary physician shortages,¹ and a statewide shortfall of more than 2,400 physicians is expected by 2030.²

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in the United States and Canada. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation. Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. WES' philanthropic arm, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, supports catalytic leaders and organizations working to build inclusive economies and to ensure that immigrants and refugees can achieve their aspirations and thrive.

Colorado can address workforce shortages by ensuring that immigrants and refugees in the state have access to educational and career pathways—especially in high-demand fields like health care. Despite their extensive international training and clinical experience, many IMGs are unable to obtain licensure in Colorado due to systemic barriers. These challenges include having to repeat years of postgraduate clinical training (residency) and limited access to residency training positions.

The need is clear. Colorado must open licensing pathways for IMGs in the state. HB 1050 would bolster Colorado's workforce: According to a study of health practices in the U.S., a primary care physician provides care to up to 1,900 patients. The legislation would support a more inclusive workforce, ensuring access to quality health care and improving outcomes for all Coloradans.³

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement of support.

¹ Dan Boyce, "Attracting Doctors to Rural Colorado Is a Big Problem. This CU Anschutz Researcher Has a Few Ideas to Fix That," CPR News (Colorado Public Radio, April 15, 2021), <https://www.cpr.org/2021/04/15/rural-colorado-doctor-shortage>.

² Xiaoming Zhang et al., "Physician Workforce in the United States of America: Forecasting Nationwide Shortages," *Human Resources for Health* 18, no. 1 (June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-020-0448-3>.

³ L.E. Gomez and Patrick Bernet, "Diversity Improves Performance and Outcomes," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 111, no. 4 (February 2019): pp. 383-392, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnma.2019.01.006>.