



S.1086 (Rivera) / A.675 (Cruz)

STAFF CONTACT : Crystal Griffith | Director of Workforce Development | 518.694.4465

<p>BILL</p> <p>S.1086 (Rivera) / A.675 (Cruz)</p>
<p>SUBJECT</p> <p>Relates to enacting the empire state licensing act</p>
<p>DATE</p> <p>February 11, 2025</p>
<p>SUPPORT</p>

The Business Council supports S.1089 (Rivera)/A.675 (Cruz), also referred to as, the Empire State Licensing Act. This legislation seeks to address workforce shortages in high-demand industries—such as healthcare, education, and social work—by ensuring that all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, have access to professional and occupational licenses. The bill removes unnecessary barriers that currently prevent immigrants and refugees from fully participating in the workforce, despite their qualifications and urgent industry needs.

New York is facing critical labor shortages, particularly in essential industries. By 2030, the state is projected to have a shortfall of 3,600 Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), further straining an already overburdened healthcare system. Demand for Registered Nurses (RNs) has surged, with immigrant professionals making up 30.4% of RNs, 32.4% of LPNs, and 42.7% of Nursing Assistants in the state. Meanwhile, job postings in the healthcare industry increased by 78.5% from 2017 to 2021, with a 104.1% rise in demand for bilingual healthcare professionals. The inability to license qualified immigrants in this field limits New York's capacity to provide adequate care, especially for diverse communities.

In education, school districts continue to struggle to find licensed teachers, particularly those qualified to support bilingual students. Job postings in New York's education sector grew by 38.6% from 2017 to 2021, while demand for K-12 bilingual teachers rose by 59.3%. Teaching assistant roles more than tripled, from 2,355 job postings to 7,225, reflecting the growing demand for classroom support staff. Despite their essential role in the education system, immigrants account for only 12.3% of K-12 teachers, with barriers to licensure preventing many more from filling these vacancies.

The need for mental health and social services professionals has also skyrocketed. Social worker job postings in New York increased by 81% between 2017 and 2021, with mental health social worker roles rising by 89.4%. During the same period, demand for substance abuse counselors nearly doubled, highlighting the urgent need for multilingual, culturally competent professionals

to serve vulnerable communities. Immigrants currently represent 25.7% of healthcare social workers and 18.4% of all social workers in the state, yet licensing barriers prevent many from entering the workforce.

Expanding access to professional and occupational licenses will strengthen workforce stability in these sectors, particularly in areas where labor shortages threaten public well-being. States such as California, Illinois, and New Jersey have successfully removed similar barriers, increasing workforce participation, expanding tax revenues, and reducing job vacancies. New York risks losing economic competitiveness if it does not follow suit.

Allowing qualified immigrants to obtain necessary credentials will:

- Strengthen workforce stability, especially in industries facing critical shortages.
- Boost state revenue by increasing taxable earnings from licensed professionals.
- Enhance public health, education, and social services by expanding access to skilled professionals.
- Ensure equitable access to career opportunities, allowing New Yorkers of all backgrounds to contribute fully to the state's economy.

This legislation removes unnecessary barriers to workforce entry, ensuring that New York can fully leverage the skills and expertise of its immigrant and refugee population. By eliminating outdated restrictions, the Empire State Licensing Act will drive economic growth, create jobs, and improve service accessibility in communities across the state.

For these reasons, The Business Council supports S.1089 (Rivera)/A.675 (Cruz)