

SB 529: Expanding the Healthcare Workforce by Creating A Pathway to Practice for Experienced International Physicians

Senate Bill 259 creates a new four-year pathway to practice for experienced international physicians who have made Georgia their home. These doctors are a ready and untapped resource to fill critical workforce gaps across the state.

Georgia is in the midst of a health workforce crisis.

- Nearly every Georgia county faces a shortage of primary care providers, requiring more than 700 doctors to fill.
- 82 of 159 counties have no OB/GYN, 65 have no pediatrician, 9 have no doctor at all.
- In 2023, the Georgia Healthcare Workforce Commission projected that the state's healthcare needs will grow, while its workforce will shrink and urged action to attract new workers.

SB 529 would ease barriers to practice for experienced international physicians in Georgia.

SB 529 would empower the Composite Medical Board to issue two-year limited licenses to qualified international physicians. After passing all medical exams and practicing under a limited license for an eligible hospital or other provider for 4 years, including 2 years in an underserved community, the physician could apply for a full license.



Georgia is fortunate to have a deep pool of global talent, including physicians moving from abroad.

- 1 in 10 Georgians – or more than one million people – moved to the state from other countries.
- The state's proud history of welcoming refugees means that it receives talented newcomers each year, many of whom have left behind medical careers in Afghanistan, Ukraine and other global conflict zones.

Georgia already relies on international physicians to provide needed care, particularly in rural areas.

- 27% of Georgia physicians and 20% of surgeons have international backgrounds.
- These physicians are a lifeline for Georgia's rural communities and possess the cultural and linguistic skills the state needs to serve its increasingly diverse population.

Yet 26% of new arrivals with healthcare degrees are underemployed, with many never practicing again.

- All international physicians must re-do a residency here, regardless of years of training and practice.
- The U.S. has a severe shortage of residencies, with 3,000 fewer spots than graduates.
- Residency slots are prioritized for new graduates. International physicians who already have experience have much lower match rates and typically spend many years and thousands of dollars on repeated applications.

The nationwide competition for international medical talent is fierce and Georgia risks losing its talent to less diverse states that have already enacted legislation like SB 259.

- SB 529 is based on a VA bill that passed unanimously out of the legislature this month. TN, FL, AL, ID, WA, CO and at least 10 other states have passed or introduced similar legislation.
- TN received 256 inquiries in just one month after Governor Lee signed a bill like SB 529 into law last year.

Resources: 2023 Report of Governor's Healthcare Workforce Commission; 2022 Kaiser Family Foundation Report; 2020 Georgia Board for Healthcare Workforce; 2023 American Immigration Council, Map The Impact: Georgia; 2023 American Immigration Council, The Growing Demand for Healthcare Workers in Georgia; Feb. 21, 2024 phone call with TN Medical Examiners Board.