

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Expanding Access to Professional and Occupational Licenses

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TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation (S2455), which prohibits lawful presence in the United States as a qualification to obtain a professional or occupational license, provided that the applicant meets all other requirements for licensure. The bill impacts the roughly 500,000 undocumented residents in New Jersey, who will now be eligible for professional licenses such as nursing, counseling and cosmetology.

“New Jersey is stronger when everyone is given the opportunity to contribute and everyone is given a chance to live their American Dream,” **said Governor Murphy**. “This law sends a simple, powerful message that immigration status can no longer be used as an excuse to discriminate among equally educated, trained, and qualified individuals. As we look toward our shared economic future, we must ensure that no one is left behind and everyone who puts forward the effort can succeed.”

Under the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), states may grant an individual who is not lawfully present in the United States eligibility for certain State or local public benefits, including professional and commercial licensure, through the enactment of state law.

“Today New Jersey is removing barriers that prevented talented, hardworking individuals from realizing their full potential as vital members of the state’s workforce,” **said Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal**. “By welcoming all qualified individuals into our professional ranks, we not only benefit from their contributions to our economy, we are building and strengthening communities across our state.”

Applicants' immigration status should have no bearing on their ability to obtain a professional or occupational license provided they meet educational and all other requirements,” **said Paul R. Rodríguez, Acting Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs**. “Eliminating the current residency requirement will allow prospective licensees who fulfill all other prerequisites to practice in their chosen profession.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear the critical role that New Jersey’s immigrant community plays in our essential frontline workforce,” **said Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson**. “It is past time for us to give these New Jerseyans the path to occupational and economic success this law will deliver. New Jersey has always been a welcoming state, and we will now be fortunate to benefit from the wide range of talents and expertise that all of our residents have to offer. The Department’s Office of New Americans looks forward to supporting community education and outreach efforts to immigrant residents who can benefit from this new law.”

“This legislation is a win-win for New Jersey workers and for employers looking to hire workers with specific training and skills,” **said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo**. “I’m proud to see our state leading the nation in prioritizing the economic stability of all families.”


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"In the midst of the pandemic our state extended emergency licenses to qualified men and women that call New Jersey home but have not been able to work due to their immigration status," **said Senator Nellie Pou**. "These frontline workers stepped up when our state needed them the most, and they should be able to take their exam and be licensed professionals, regardless of their immigration status, even after we defeat the virus."

"This will help remove barriers that limit the ability of trained professionals to perform jobs they are qualified for," **said Senator Joe Cryan**. "They can make important professional and economic contributions to the communities they live and work in. For example, there are an estimated 6,000 immigrants with nursing degrees who are ready and willing to help provide critically-needed medical care during the public health crisis. We should welcome their service."

"New Jersey's 53,000 DACA-eligible residents, including nearly 17,000 active DACA status holders, pay more than \$100 million in state and local taxes annually," **said Assemblyman Raj Mukherji, Chair of the Assembly Judiciary Committee**. "They are risking their and their families' lives everyday as frontline healthcare workers and in other essential jobs during the pandemic. By eliminating barriers to occupational licenses, we will enable qualified, trained, highly skilled, and hardworking Dreamers to fill critical worker shortages in our state while contributing to the economy and being treated with dignity. New Jersey, whose waters are home to Ellis Island, is celebrated for its diversity and thriving immigrant population. If a DACA student – like several who testified before our committee – aspires to be a teacher, nurse, or physician and takes the MCATs, is admitted to and graduates from medical school, and completes a residency, we would be fools to deprive our communities of their hard-earned skills and talents while facing an unprecedented public health crisis."

"Removing immigration status as a prerequisite for licensure is incredibly important for New Jersey today and to create a path for the generations to follow," **said Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez**. "Countless individuals have put in the hours, receiving the necessary education and training for their chosen profession, but despite standing ready to work they still aren't allowed to. As a state we have the power to change that."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has placed incredible demands on our essential employees and healthcare workers," **said Assemblyman Gary Schaer**. "This new law will allow us to address labor shortages in these vital areas by removing barriers for our highly qualified undocumented students and graduates to become licensed. Our immigrant community has been indispensable throughout this crisis, by lifting this obstacle we can utilize the abilities of every single resident. We are one State, sharing one struggle and one future, together we will ensure that New Jersey always meets the needs of our residents."

"As an aspiring doctor, I faced barriers to pursuing a career in medicine due to my immigration status at a moment when our state needs us most," **said Estrella Rivas, Youth Leader at Make the Road New Jersey and Third-Year Premed Student at Rutgers University**. "Today, I no longer have to watch from the sidelines, I can pursue my degree and be there to provide aid to our most vulnerable New Jerseyans. This law takes away unconstitutional and unnecessary barriers to occupational licensure and ensures that all New Jerseyans, regardless of their immigration status, are able to contribute to our state and pursue our dreams whether it be as a doctor, a manicurist, CPA, nurse or one of the hundreds of licensed professions in New Jersey. Thank you to Gov Murphy, Senator Nellie Pou and Assemblyman Raj Mukherji for your leadership and unwavering support."

"Today is the culmination of a two-year campaign for access to occupational licenses led by immigrants from all walks of life," **said Erika Martinez, Organizer at Make the Road New Jersey**. "Today, as the Trump administration threatens DACA and continues to separate our families, we win the freedom to thrive. With this law, New Jersey becomes the first state on the East Coast to extend occupational licenses to undocumented immigrants. Thank you to our sponsors Nellie Pou and Assemblyman Raj Mukherji for their leadership and to Governor Murphy for his support."

"This is another step forward for New Jersey and the humane and progressive agenda championed by Governor Murphy," **said Frank Argote-Freyre, Chair of the Latino Action Network Foundation**. "This legislation will economically empower thousands of hard-working immigrants across the state. It will also allow New Jersey to tap into a vast and diverse pool of talent unavailable to it before. The other advantage is it will fill critical shortages in many professions. Everyone wins."

"During the pandemic, we witnessed the extreme shortage of healthcare and medical workers," **said Maneesha Kelkar, Interim Director of New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice.** "With the signing of bill S2455 into law, not only is New Jersey opening the doors to opportunities for thousands of young immigrants to pursue their dreams of becoming doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, HVAC technicians, and teachers, but also easing worker shortages in critical areas. Allowing young professionals to pursue their careers in the Garden State will make our economy and communities stronger."

"Expanding access to professional licenses will strengthen New Jersey's workforce and provide economic opportunity to thousands of families across the state," **said Vineeta Kapahi, Policy Analyst at New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP).** "By removing barriers to occupational licenses, more immigrants will be able to pursue the careers for which they have trained, increase their earnings and tax contributions, and help fill critical worker shortages. NJPP applauds Governor Murphy and the Legislature for taking this important step to make New Jersey's economy both stronger and fairer."

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