

To: Beau Perschbacher, Policy & Legislative Director of Washington State Department of Licensing, Tacoma WA  
From: Priscila Desiderio, Deputy Director of Mi Centro, Tacoma WA  
Date: January 26, 2024  
Re: Providing Occupational Licenses to Undocumented Immigrants

In 2021, the demand for jobs requiring occupational licenses increased by 22 percent. Currently, obtaining an occupational license requires having a valid social security number. In Washington state, there are approximately 300,000 undocumented immigrants facing barriers to accessing these licenses. Recognizing the need for change, House Bill 1889 emerges as a transformative proposal. It advocates for access to professional licenses without regard to immigration or citizenship status. This legislation is a significant stride toward inclusivity, aiming to dismantle barriers and create equal opportunities. The anticipated outcome is a more diverse workforce, which, in turn, is expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing Washington's economic landscape.

HB 1889 was introduced on December 2023 “AN ACT Relating to allowing persons to receive professional licenses and certifications regardless of immigration or citizenship status; amending RCW 18.235.020, 18.53.060, 18.185.020, 19.230.040, 19.230.090, and 42.45.200; reenacting and amending RCW 18.130.040; adding a new section to chapter 28A.410 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.413 RCW; adding a new chapter to Title 18 RCW; and providing an effective date” (*WA State Legislature page for HB1889*). Sponsored by Representatives Walen, Taylor, Leavitt, Slatter, Ramel, Duerr, Ryu, Ramos, Bateman, Reeves, Reed, Ormsby, Callan, Peterson, Kloba, Macri, Street, Doglio, Bergquist, Mena, Goodman, Thai, Santos, Hackney, Pollet, Fosse, Davis, and Senn.

By supporting House Bill 1889, you are advocating for access to professional licenses without consideration of immigration or citizenship status, this legislation aligns with the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and equal opportunity. Removing these barriers not only addresses a pressing need for the estimated 300,000 undocumented immigrants in Washington but also contributes to the creation of a more diverse and skilled workforce.

The absence of these opportunities in our state lends to community impacts above and beyond low wage jobs and family struggles that often accompany poverty. Children from poor backgrounds lag behind in all stages of education. Residents of impoverished communities also experience poorer health outcomes, have limited access to healthy foods, are more likely to experience inadequate housing or live in dilapidated housing and experience higher instances of violence. All of these realities perpetuate the cyclical effects of poverty.

I urge stakeholders and policymakers to consider the long-term benefits of this transformative proposal and its potential positive impact on individuals, families and the state's economy. By championing House Bill 1889, Washington has the opportunity to lead the way in fostering inclusivity and equal opportunities for all its residents.