

Samuel Smithwick
Biddeford
LD 105

My name is Samuel S. Smithwick and I am the Language Coordinator for Biddeford Adult Education and a board member with Heart of Biddeford. As an educator and advocate for the immigrant community of Maine, I have had numerous opportunities to work with individuals from around the world who bring valuable educational and vocational experience to our state. Among those individuals, numerous have the healthcare experience that we in Maine so desperately need.

Maine has a severe healthcare workforce shortage, in the populated south and rural north. With highly skilled, foreign-trained physicians living in Maine, our economy has thus far failed to capture the vast education and experience of too many of our New Mainers. LD 105 is a step toward solving this crisis by creating a sponsorship program that helps internationally trained physicians complete the necessary training and testing to obtain full licensure in Maine. Through a grant fund administered by the Finance Authority of Maine, this legislation would support 10 physicians in overcoming licensing barriers

While some fields provide easier access to working professionals: engineers, IT, I have worked with a renowned young Pediatrician from Afghanistan and an expert in public health that participated in several responses against epidemics including Ebola, Measles, Cholera, and Covid-19. Too often these medical professionals are working entry level jobs in healthcare, or working outside of the medical field.

With a population that is both aging and growing in diversity, increasing the number of qualified physicians is critical to ensuring timely and accessible care for all Mainers. Immigrants already play a vital role in Maine's healthcare system. From 2015 to 2019, 15.9% of the state's physicians and surgeons and 4.5% of registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and licensed practical nurses were foreign-born. The demand for bilingual and culturally competent healthcare professionals continues to rise—between 2018 and 2022, job postings requiring bilingual skills in Maine increased by 180%. Internationally trained physicians are uniquely positioned to meet this need, bringing essential language skills and diverse cultural perspectives that enhance patient care. By improving access to preventative healthcare, they also help reduce long-term medical costs and strengthen public health across the state.

In conclusion, LD 105 is a practical foundation that aims to strengthen Maine's healthcare system by investing in the professionals already living here. This legislation has the potential to address provider shortages, expand healthcare access, and improve patient outcomes across the state. We urge you to support LD 105 and help ensure that Maine can make the most of the valuable talent and expertise of foreign-trained physicians living in our state.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.
Sincerely,
Samuel S. Smithwick