



NJ Assembly Judiciary Committee  
Statement of Alexis Rean-Walker, HPAE Secretary-Treasurer  
In support of A.4255  
Monday, July 20, 2020

Good Morning Chairman Mukherji and the members of Assembly Judiciary Committee. My name is Alexis Rean-Walker, Secretary-Treasurer of HPAE, representing 14,0000 nurses and health care workers across New Jersey in hospitals, nursing homes, blood bank facilities, medical research labs, behavioral health and addiction recovery facilities. Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the need to expand access to professional and occupational licenses for those qualified to obtain licensure. We strongly urge you to vote in favor of A. 4225, sponsored by Assemblyman Mukherji, Assemblywoman Lopez and Assemblyman Schaer.

Later this afternoon, HPAE is holding a press conference to release a white paper titled, "Exposed & At-Risk" which highlights the experiences of HPAE members who worked on the frontlines battling COVID-19 for the last four months. Included in the report are recommendation for how NJ can be better prepared for any surges in COVID-19 or any future pandemic outbreaks. One of those recommendations is to improve staffing capacity at healthcare facilities to ensure patients' treatment plans are provided in a safe manner and lead to better health outcomes for vulnerable and highest risk patients.

Passage of A.2455 will remove barriers to obtaining professional and occupational licenses for qualified individuals therefore allowing for the state's healthcare facilities to meet the demand for increased staffing levels when a labor shortage exists as it did during the peak of the pandemic outbreak. Highly trained and skilled immigrants are a source of expertise and can fulfill the need for to hire highly sought after healthcare professionals such as critical care nurses and respiratory therapists. Such licensed professionals were in high demand and also the most at risk which led to a shortage in the workforce as many fell ill themselves. Yet it was those professionals who were needed to provide critical care and treatment for those who suffered the consequences of having contracted COVID-19.

New Jersey is a state known for welcoming immigrants, historically through Ellis Island and now through various means of transportation, yet we welcome all who are seeking refuge or perhaps opportunities they may not have had in their home country. 97,000 undocumented adults in NJ have a bachelor, graduate or professional degree. By removing barriers to professional licenses for all qualified individuals in New Jersey, regardless of immigration status, New Jersey can ensure Dreamers and all qualified residents are able to contribute to the economy and help to battle pandemic outbreaks when we desperately need licensed healthcare professionals to assist during critical times.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter. Once again, I urge to vote in favor of A. 4225 which prohibits lawful presence in United States as qualification for obtaining professional or occupational license.

*HPAE is the largest union of registered nurses and health care professionals in New Jersey. Since its founding by Englewood Hospital nurses in 1974, HPAE has expanded across the state and into Southeastern Pennsylvania representing 13,000 nurses, social workers, therapists, technicians, medical researchers, and other health care professionals in hospitals, nursing homes, home care agencies, blood banks, and university research facilities. HPAE is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.*