



April 15, 2026

**RE:** A 675A/S 1086A, the Empire State Licensing Act

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and Members of the New York State Legislature:

The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, in partnership with TheDream.US, writes in strong support of the Empire State Licensing Act (S.1086A / A.675A). This legislation would ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, are eligible to obtain professional, occupational, commercial, or business licenses, as well as permits, certificates, and related registrations.

This position is informed by our policy research, demographic analyses of immigrant origin students, and our collective work with colleges, universities, and students across New York State. Through this work, we have seen how access to professional licensure functions as a key pathway to opportunity, enabling immigrant origin students and graduates to contribute their skills and education to New York's workforce and economy.

**I. About the Presidents' Alliance, TheDream.US, and Supporting Immigrant-Origin Students**

The nonpartisan, nonprofit Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration brings together college and university leaders to address immigration issues affecting their students, campuses, communities, and the nation. The Alliance comprises close to 600 presidents and chancellors of public and private colleges and universities and their institutions, enrolling over five million students across 42 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. In New York, our membership includes **54** institutions, representing both two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities.

The Presidents' Alliance supports member campuses by providing data, evidence-based resources, and policy analyses, including expert analysis regarding the benefits of expanding access to professional licensure, most recently in Washington and Maryland.

Our analysis of policies that grant all qualified immigrant-origin students access to professional and occupational licensing shows that it is a critical pathway to careers that support students while filling workforce gaps in industries facing severe labor shortages. Dreamer students are an untapped and invaluable resource. Empowering these students who have been trained in these fields helps ensure the economic health and resilience of New York and other states.

TheDream.US is the nation's leading organization supporting Dreamers at the intersection of higher education, workforce development, immigration, and advocacy. TheDream.US has awarded over 12,000 scholarships to immigrant youth from 120+ countries and 45 states, with 4,500 graduates to date. We partner with close to 80 colleges in 20 states to provide

scholarships, career support, and access to legal options that help Dreamers break through systemic barriers and achieve social mobility. Through data, Scholar and Alumni stories, strategic partnerships, and targeted state and local advocacy, we work to expand equitable access to college, professional pathways, and permanent legal status.<sup>1</sup>

Over half of TheDream.US Scholars and alumni have pursued careers in business, healthcare, and education—sectors facing acute worker shortages. The data underscores their contributions: among our 800 Scholars currently enrolled across 18 CUNY and 3 SUNY campuses, 26% are studying Science, Math, and Technology, 24% are in Social Sciences, 19% are in Business, and 12% are in Health and Medicine. Of our 860 Alumni, many are already working in critical sectors—20% in Business, 19% in Health and Medicine, 19% in Public and Social Services, and 17% in Education. These numbers illustrate that Dreamers are well-prepared to meet New York’s workforce demands, particularly in licensed professions such as healthcare and teaching.

America’s workforce and economic competitiveness benefit from pathways and opportunities for immigrant, international, and refugee students and graduates. At a time when New York and other states are competing for talent, policies that support immigrant students’ access to career pathways and potential to contribute directly to the workforce challenges of today and tomorrow are crucial. At the Presidents’ Alliance, we work to increase policymakers’ and the public’s understanding of the important contributions of these populations and develop policy education in support of forward-looking immigration policies and practices at the federal and state levels.

## **II. Professional Licensure as a Critical Pathway to Opportunity**

The importance of access to professional licensure cannot be overstated—it is a critical factor in enabling college and career access and equity, particularly for immigrant students across both public and private institutions. Immigrants bring valuable skills, perspectives, and energy to New York. They are innovators, problem-solvers, and leaders. Yet, professional barriers often stand in their way, keeping them from reaching their full potential. Many graduates from New York’s colleges and universities find themselves barred from practicing in essential fields—nursing, dentistry, paramedics, and social work—due to existing legislative barriers.

These obstacles not only hinder individual progress but also contribute to workforce shortages and leave critical gaps in industries vital to New York’s economy. With close to [170,000 first generation immigrant students](#) enrolled in higher education institutions in New York, including over [25,000 undocumented students](#), expanding access to professional licensure to qualified applicants will benefit the New York economy and its communities. With the Empire State Licensing Act, New York has an opportunity to advance the career trajectories and contributions of immigrant students while boosting the state’s economy and meeting the state’s critical workforce needs.

## **III. Data on Immigrant Contributions**

[Data from the American Immigration Council](#) highlights the significant contributions that immigrant communities make to New York’s economic and cultural fabric. Immigrants account

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<sup>1</sup> [TheDream.US](#) 10 Year Impact [report](#), February 2025

for 23.1 percent of the state’s population—approximately 4,530,000 residents—and play a crucial role in shaping our communities. Their influence extends to the next generation, as nearly 12.1 percent of U.S.-born residents live with at least one immigrant parent, underscoring the enduring impact of immigrant families on our society.

The economic contributions of immigrants are equally compelling. Immigrant households possess a combined spending power of \$160.5 billion and contribute \$74.8 billion annually in taxes, a figure that supports vital public services such as education, healthcare, and public safety. In the workforce, immigrants represent 27.8 percent of workers in New York—roughly 2,816,900 individuals who fill essential roles across a range of industries. Moreover, immigrants account for 34.3 percent of entrepreneurs in the state, with approximately 316,500 business founders generating \$8.6 billion in business income. Their presence is also evident in critical sectors such as STEM, where they hold 26.6 percent of positions, and in healthcare, where they comprise 30.6 percent of nurses and play indispensable roles in other service-oriented occupations.

This data underscores that expanding access to licensure is not only a matter of fairness and equity but also a critical strategy for addressing workforce shortages and stimulating economic growth across the state.

#### **IV. Licensure Policies in Other States**

[Similar legislation](#) has been successfully enacted in several other states, including California, Colorado, New Mexico, Illinois, New Jersey, Maryland, Washington, and Delaware. Most recently, the Washington legislature passed HB 1889 on March 13, 2024, allowing licensure boards to issue licenses to applicants regardless of immigration status.

New York must not fall behind. New York’s future depends on a workforce that is skilled, diverse, and fully included in our state’s economic engine. Passing the Empire State Licensing Act will ensure that New York remains a leader in opportunity, inclusion, and economic growth. We urge the Legislature and Governor to act swiftly to remove these unnecessary barriers and allow all New Yorkers to fully contribute to the best of their abilities.

This information is offered to demonstrate the legislation’s potential implications for New York and to solicit your support and action to advance the Empire State Licensing Act. For additional information or follow-up, please contact the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration at [monica@presidentsalliance.org](mailto:monica@presidentsalliance.org) or [TheDream.US](http://TheDream.US) at [susan.collins@thedream.us](mailto:susan.collins@thedream.us).

Sincerely,



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