

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5118

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care & Wellness

Title: An act relating to updating the requirements for the clinical experience license for international medical graduates.

Brief Description: Updating the requirements for the clinical experience license for international medical graduates.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Valdez, Orwall, Nobles, Saldaña and Stanford).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care & Wellness: 3/14/25, 3/19/25 [DP].

<p>Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Makes changes to limited licenses for international medical graduates.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Bronoske, Chair; Lekanoff, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Marshall, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Davis, Engell, Low, Macri, Obras, Parshley, Shavers, Simmons, Stonier, Stuebe, Thai and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Caldier, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Jim Morishima (786-7191).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Physicians are licensed by the Washington Medical Commission (WMC). To be licensed as a physician, an individual who graduated from a medical school in the United States or Canada must pass an examination, complete at least two years of post-graduate medical training, have good moral character, and possess the ability to safely practice medicine.

An international medical graduate (IMG) must meet all of the requirements applicable to graduates of domestic medical schools. Additionally, an IMG must be able to read, write, speak, understand, and be understood in English and must be certified by the Educational Council for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Certification from the ECFMG is necessary prior to an IMG participating in a residency or fellowship or taking Step 3 of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE).

An IMG is eligible for two different types of limited licenses in order to gain clinical experience. First, the WMC may issue a time-limited clinical experience license to an IMG for purposes of gaining clinical experience at an approved facility or program.

Second, the WMC may issue a limited license to an IMG upon nomination by a hospital, a medical practice, the Department of Social and Health Services; the Department of Children, Youth, and Families; the Department of Corrections; or a county or city health department. To be eligible for this limited license, the IMG must have been a Washington resident for at least a year, be certified by the ECFMG, passed all steps of the USMLE, and submitted to a background check. An IMG licensed in this manner may only practice within the nominating facility under the supervision and control of a licensed physician subject to a practice agreement. The license may only be renewed once.

Summary of Bill:

The limited license for international medical graduates (IMGs) is changed in the following ways:

- Gaining clinical experience is stated as the purpose of the limited license for IMGs.
- The one-year residency requirement is eliminated.
- An IMG must only complete Steps 1 and 2 of the United States Medical Licensing Examination to be eligible.
- The license may be renewed up to three times for a total of eight years—prior to the third renewal, the applicant must attest that the applicant has applied to at least one residency program.

The practice agreement must be filed prior to the IMG practicing under the limited license. The IMG's scope of practice must be defined in the agreement. Unless limited by disciplinary action, the licensee is considered a full-scope physician for purposes of medical practice, employment role, malpractice coverage, and insurance billing.

The Washington Medical Commission (WMC) in its sole discretion may elect to waive

requirements in statute or rule when considering IMGs experiencing hardship in providing required documents for license applications. The WMC may also require alternate demonstrations of competence that may include examinations or specialty assessments, supervised practice, or other appropriate evaluation tools satisfactory to the WMC. Hardship scenarios the WMC may consider include refugee status, persecution in the applicant's home country due to the applicant's beliefs, ethnicity, or other demographic considerations. The WMC may not consider as a hardship the inability of the applicant to complete the certification and examination processes administered by the Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates or the failure of required examinations.

The time-limited clinical experience license is eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Approximately 40 international medical graduates (IMGs) hold the current IMG license and serve around 35,000 patients. Most of those patients are in rural and underserved areas. Many of these IMGs are practicing family medicine. Some are in specialties like psychiatry. Without this license, many patients will face long waits for care. These graduates have the same training and qualifications as domestically trained physicians. The IMG license is a pathway to clinical experience, which is necessary for these professionals to find a residency match. This country is built by those who ask what they can do for their country and this bill will help IMGs give back to their communities. This bill will have no fiscal impact and will help address provider shortages. This bill will reduce hospital admissions and help with antibiotic stewardship. This bill is not a handout, but will allow trained physicians to fill critical gaps. This bill solidifies the parameters of the IMG license.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The IMG license has been a resounding success and a model for other states. The four-year limitation on the license, however, has led to uncertainty and has been disruptive to patients and employers. A preceptorship pathway would lead to full licensure. Some IMGs are leaving Washington for other states with more stable pathways.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Javier Valdez, prime sponsor; Micah Matthews, Washington Medical Commission; Fatima Mirza, Washington Medical Commission;

Okasana Nesterenko, MD, Pacific Medical Specialties Group; Caleb Chu, MD, Pacific Medical Specialties Group; Neriza Mercado, MD, Pacific Medical Specialties Group; and Alex Wehinger, Washington State Medical Association (WSMA).

(Other) Mohamed Khalif, The International Medical Graduates Academy (TIMGA).

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.