

Rescue.org

2026 STATE POLICY GUIDE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 3

How to Use this Guide 3

Expanding Access to Food Security 4

Expanding Access to Higher Education 7

Investing in Immigration Legal Services 10

Capitalizing on Workforce Development Opportunities 13

Acknowledgements 17

Introduction

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) works closely with state elected leaders to ensure that the communities in which we operate are welcoming places for refugees and other new Americans. In addition to educating legislators, we assess [introduced legislation through a state tracker](#), identify new model policies and identify emerging legislative trends. This annual guide represents the culmination of these ongoing activities.

This year's state policy and advocacy guide reflects efforts by states to build and strengthen infrastructure and resources to welcome refugees and other newcomers to their communities amid a rapidly shifting federal landscape. These measures not only help ensure new Americans can achieve economic self-sufficiency and integrate more smoothly, but they positively impact the broader community as well. We share in the personal and professional successes of our new neighbors, which strengthen our economy, workplaces, schools, and community.

Please check out previous editions of this guide for additional policy ideas:

- ▶ [2025 State Policy Guide](#)
- ▶ [2023 State Policy Guide](#)
- ▶ [2024 State Policy Guide](#)
- ▶ [2022 State Policy Guide](#)

How to Use this Guide

This guide is designed for advocates with any level of experience. Drafting and supporting welcoming policies should be done in coordination with local agencies serving refugees and other newcomers as well as with impacted communities to identify and address the most pressing needs. Each policy theme in this guide includes two sections:

- 1. Policy recommendations** which include issue summary, policy drafting best practices, model policies already introduced and advanced in other states.
- 2. Strategic engagement guidance** specific to the political environment of your state, including a checklist of strategic considerations and key targets within legislative committees, and local and national partners.

When reviewing our suggestions for advancing legislation, reflect on the following key questions:

- ▶ **Have you assessed how these issues impact newcomer communities in your state?**
- ▶ **What are your own gaps in knowledge? Do you need to consult with a policy specialist to learn more about how to address an issue in your state?**
- ▶ **What is your capacity to engage stakeholders, elected leaders, and advance policy through the legislative process?**

It is important to remember that while we propose model examples in this guide, each state is different with its own state code, legislative and regulatory processes and procedures, constituencies, advocacy landscape, and other interested stakeholders. Perform a detailed review of these components before pursuing policies.

If you have questions about any of the content and recommendations, please contact: Genevieve Kessler, Director of State Advocacy: genevieve.kessler@rescue.org or Director of Policy: daniel.berlin@rescue.org.

Expanding Access to Food Security

ISSUE SUMMARY

Access to nutritious food is one of the most immediate and essential needs for everyone, including refugees and other newcomers. Evidence shows that food insecurity during childhood can have lifelong impacts on cognitive and academic development. Yet many families experience high rates of food insecurity during their first months and years in the U.S., while also navigating resettlement, housing, work authorization, and school enrollment. Federal restrictions have long limited access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for many immigrants, but the passage of H.R.1 (119th) in July 2025 has excluded additional populations from eligibility. Other recent federal measures have significantly reduced assistance across multiple programs. As a result, families in transition, including refugees and asylees, trafficking survivors, individuals granted withholding of removal, VAWA self-petitioners, and humanitarian parolees, will soon be or are now unable to access the basic nutrition supports available to most low-income households and children. Only lawful permanent residents (LPRs), Cuban/Haitian entrants and persons residing under a Compact of Free Association (COFA) will be eligible. As under existing law, previously ineligible people who adjust to LPR status will then become eligible, though some, such as former parolees or VAWA self-petitioners, may be subject to a five-year waiting period.

Several states have sought to close the gap in access to food by using state funds to expand food assistance programs to immigrants excluded from federal SNAP. States will need to reexamine or adopt new policies to ensure that they cover the individuals who will lose assistance due to H.R.1. “Food for all” campaigns in some states aim to provide nutrition assistance regardless of immigration status.

All states provide school meals to eligible children, regardless of their immigration status, and some offer universal school meals for all children. Free school lunch programs have become a critical lifeline for children in newcomer families, ensuring they receive at least one nutritious meal each day. By building on these models, states have a clear opportunity to reduce hunger, improve health, and lower long-term public costs. Targeted investment in food assistance is not only a humanitarian necessity but also a sound economic strategy that supports newcomer families' stability, educational success, and integration into the workforce.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

- ▶ Provide state-funded nutrition assistance to refugees, asylees and other newcomer populations regardless of immigration status to support their initial transition to self-sufficiency.
- ▶ Codify into law a permanent universal free breakfast and lunch program for all children in public schools.
- ▶ Establish and fund state-level local food purchase initiatives that buy from local farmers and producers and supply nutritious food for schools and food banks that supply faith and other community groups for distribution.
- ▶ Ensure that all pregnant people, infants and children who are eligible for WIC can get the food support they need by reducing bureaucratic hurdles in registration and eligibility check processes.

ALTERNATIVES & COMPROMISES

- ▶ Phase in state-funded nutrition assistance eligibility over multiple years or categories. Rather than extending access to all groups at once, legislatures can update state codes annually to add new populations (such as child refugees and asylees in year one, adult refugees and asylees in year two, etc.), therefore building momentum over time.
- ▶ Provide annual budget support for free breakfast and lunch for children in public schools as an alternative to establishing a permanent codified program.
- ▶ Reduce SNAP administrative costs and prevent fraud and abuse by introducing legislation and/or providing appropriations to upgrade to chip-based EBT cards that reduce vulnerability of recipients to theft of their nutrition support to credit card skimming, cloning and other schemes. Several states have or are in the process of doing so, including Alabama, California, Maryland, New Jersey, and Oklahoma.
- ▶ Fund local initiatives that increase SNAP recipients purchasing power of nutritious foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, by offering matching funds for use at participating grocery stores and farmers' markets.
- ▶ Collect disaggregated and anonymized data to improve service - leveraging technology like live chat, email, text, and electronic surveys – to understand hurdles to and improve delivery of these services.

STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

State & bill number	Summary/details
Oregon (2025) <u>S.B. 611</u> : <i><u>Establishes the Food for All Oregonians Program</u></i>	Would, if adopted, provide nutrition assistance to Oregon children who are six or under and who would qualify for SNAP but for their immigration status.
New York (2025) <u>A.6632</u> : <i><u>Establishes SNAP for all</u></i>	Would, if adopted, establish a state-funded supplemental nutrition assistance program to provide for the immigrant population.
New Mexico (2023) <u>S.B. 4</u> : <i><u>Healthy Universal School Meals</u></i>	Extending the New Mexico Grown Grant program to provide public school districts \$2 million in funding to purchase food from local growers.
Virginia (2024) <u>S.B. 283</u> : <i><u>Free School Meals; A working group to study</u></i>	Requires all public and elementary and secondary schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to any student who requests it.
Michigan (2025) <u>S.B. 166</u> : <i><u>Appropriations School Aid</u></i>	Provides \$200 million annual budget support to ensure all public school children continue to have access to nutritious free meals.

ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Consider the political environment in which you are working to assess whether you need a multi-year strategy (phasing in access, piloting school meals, launching commissions) or can advance comprehensive food security legislation in a single year.
- ☐ Verify whether the challenge encountered by affected individuals is due to federal SNAP restrictions, lack of state-funded alternatives, or administrative barriers to WIC and school meals. Tailor policy language accordingly.
- ☐ Research your state's current policies on nutrition assistance, school meals, and immigrant eligibility using resources from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), National Immigration Law Center, and the Urban Institute.

- ❑ Identify whether expanding food access requires statutory change, appropriations, or agency-level regulation within your state (e.g., Department of Education or Department of Agriculture).
- ❑ Collect data on hunger and food insecurity among newcomer populations in your state to demonstrate urgency and highlight disparities.
- ❑ Build strong economic and workforce arguments: emphasize the role of food security in children's educational outcomes, adult labor force participation, and reduced long-term healthcare costs.
- ❑ Core tasks: craft relevant messaging; power map targets and partners; effective engagement tactics

OPTIONS FOR TARGETED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

RED	Consider a phased strategy that begins with school meal expansion (reduced-price breakfast/lunch) rather than state-funded SNAP replacement programs. Frame the effort around supporting children's academic achievement and reducing fraud by modernizing EBT card systems.
PURPLE	Advance legislation providing universal free or reduced-price school meals while piloting or partially funding state-level nutrition assistance for immigrant families excluded from SNAP.
BLUE	Pursue comprehensive expansion of state-funded nutrition assistance to cover all excluded immigrant groups, paired with permanent universal school meal legislation. Establish reporting and accountability mechanisms to ensure newcomers are not wrongfully denied food supports. Incorporate equity-driven language and explicit recognition of refugee, asylum, and parolee populations.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE TARGETS

- ▶ Health & Human Services Committees (nutrition, WIC, SNAP, and health outcomes)
- ▶ Education Committees (school meals, local food sourcing)
- ▶ Agriculture Committees (farm-to-school and local food purchase initiatives)
- ▶ Appropriations & Budget Committees (funding for state nutrition programs, EBT modernization, and local grants)

COALITION BUILDING & PARTNERS

- ▶ National Leads: Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), No Kid Hungry, Urban Institute.
- ▶ Immigrant-Focused Organizations: National Immigration Law Center (NILC), Migration Policy Institute (MPI)
- ▶ Health & Nutrition Advocates: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), state public health associations, Feeding America and local food banks.
- ▶ Education & School Partners: State Teachers' Associations, PTAs, school boards, and superintendents.
- ▶ Agricultural & Local Food Allies: State Farm Bureaus, local farmers' markets associations, Buy Local initiatives.
- ▶ Faith & Community Groups: Interfaith coalitions, refugee resettlement agencies, and food pantry networks serving immigrant communities.

Expanding Access to Higher Education

ISSUE SUMMARY

Across the U.S., refugees and other new Americans pursue higher education as a key pathway to economic stability, personal growth, and long-term integration. Many arrive with advanced degrees or professional experience, while others are eager to begin their academic journeys for the first time. However, access to public higher education remains deeply unequal. Newcomers often face a complex mix of financial, legal, and bureaucratic barriers, including ineligibility for in-state tuition or financial aid, difficulty proving residency, and uncertainty about what documentation is accepted by colleges and universities.

In addition to affordability challenges, newcomers frequently encounter unique educational disruptions or systemic gaps. Their previous academic records may be incomplete or not recognized. Many have experienced interrupted education due to conflict or displacement; and moreover, most are unfamiliar with U.S. college admissions systems. Even when they meet academic requirements, institutional policies can be unclear or inconsistent.

Addressing these barriers is not only a matter of fairness. It is also a strategic investment in local and state economies. Refugees and other immigrants are essential to the long-term vitality of U.S. communities, especially as states face workforce shortages in key sectors. With targeted higher education policies, states can unlock the potential of these aspiring students, equipping them with the credentials and skills they need to contribute fully to the workforce, strengthen community ties, and build long-term economic security for their families. By expanding access to in-state tuition and related supports, state lawmakers have a powerful tool to promote inclusion, upward mobility, and economic growth at the same time.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

- ▶ Expand eligibility for in-state tuition through clear legislative language. Refugees, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, humanitarian parolees, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients often face barriers due to restrictive residency definitions or unclear legal status. States can ensure equitable access by explicitly including these groups in eligibility for in-state tuition at public colleges and universities, or by adjusting residency criteria (e.g., years in-state or local high school attendance) to allow non-citizen students, including undocumented youth, to qualify without referencing immigration status.
- ▶ Include implementation requirements that ensure awareness and outreach. Legislation should require institutions of higher education to publicize new in-state tuition eligibility rules, including through multilingual admissions materials, training for admissions staff, and targeted outreach to newcomer communities.
- ▶ Mandate institutional collaboration for implementation. Partner with public colleges, higher education boards, and state integration offices to create consistent enrollment practices, remove institutional confusion, and monitor student access across campuses.
- ▶ Establish accountability and appeals mechanisms. Include legislative language to require schools to create an appeals process for students denied in-state tuition in error.
- ▶ Extend in-state tuition to undocumented students through tuition equity laws.

ALTERNATIVES & COMPROMISES

- ▶ Phase in eligibility over multiple years or categories. Rather than extending access to all groups at once, legislatures can update state codes annually to add new populations (such as refugees in year one, TPS holders in year two), therefore building momentum over time.
- ▶ Allow institutional discretion on tuition classification. Permit individual colleges or systems to decide whether to grant in-state tuition to certain newcomer groups, giving schools flexibility without changing statewide mandates.
- ▶ Tie tuition access to workforce participation or community contributions. Frame access as a return on investment for the state by requiring eligible newcomers to demonstrate employment, community service, or participation in resettlement programs.
- ▶ Fund a state commission or task force to study tuition barriers. Launch a formal study or legislative task force to assess the educational and economic impact of current tuition policies and recommend changes in future sessions.

STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

State & bill number	Summary/details
Utah (2023) H.B. 102 : <i>Higher Education Residency Requirements</i>	Allow immigrant students (including refugees, asylees, DACA, TPS, and other humanitarian immigrants) to access in-state tuition.
Vermont (2022) S. 283 : <i>An act relating to miscellaneous changes to education laws</i>	Removes residency restrictions for refugees to access in-state tuition rates.
Colorado (2018) S.B. 18-87 : <i>In-state Tuition Foreign Nationals Settled In Colorado</i>	Removes the residency requirement for refugees and SIVs to access in-state tuition.
Oregon (2025) H.B. 2586 : <i>Relating to nonresident tuition exemption for asylum seekers; and declaring an emergency</i>	Facilitates an exemption process for asylum seekers to access in-state tuition rates.
Virginia (2020) H.B. 1179 : <i>Higher educational institutions, public; in-state tuition, refugees</i>	Removes residency requirements for refugees and SIVs to access in-state tuition rates.
New York (2023) S. 6129 : <i>Requires the establishment of an appeals process for students who are denied the state resident tuition rate at any public university or college</i>	Establishes accountability mechanisms if a student feels that in-state tuition access was wrongfully denied by an institution of higher education.

ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

- ❑ Consider the political environment in which you are working to assess if you need a multi-year strategy or can make comprehensive change in a single year.
- ❑ Verify if the challenge encountered by impacted individuals is due to their immigration status or their length of residency in the state. Verify this with institutions of higher education and craft policy language accordingly.
- ❑ Research your state's current policies on in-state tuition with the President's Alliance for Higher Education Immigration "Portal to the States".
- ❑ Identify if this is a policy or regulatory change. In some states, the state's Board of Regents can determine which populations qualify for in-state tuition. Collect enrollment data to ensure parity.
- ❑ Core tasks: craft relevant messaging; power map targets and partners; effective engagement tactics

OPTIONS FOR TARGETED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Red State Option	Consider a multi-year strategy which gradually expands access to immigrant populations. This can include a year for education and to introduce language without expectation of the policy advancing.
Purple State Option	Consider a broad expansion of in-state tuition residency waiver to include refugees, humanitarian parolees, and special immigrant visa recipients.
Blue State Option	Incorporate language in the policy which establishes and resources outreach and education around in-state tuition rules for non-citizens. Create a reporting mechanism for those who might be wrongfully denied access to seek review of their claim.

ANTICIPATED LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE TARGETS

Education Committees and Appropriation Committees.

COALITION BUILDING AND PARTNER TARGETS

The national lead organization on this issue is the President's Alliance for Higher Education. Engage institutions of higher education early on in the process both to assess the challenge and ensure public support. Their own advocates may wish to lend capacity. For regulatory focused changes, engage your State Board of Higher Education or Board of Regents.

Investing in Immigration Legal Services

ISSUE SUMMARY

Non-citizens are facing increasing uncertainty in the U.S. What was already a complicated system of rules regulating immigration status has become more chaotic. Executive orders and court decisions can change the legal status of hundreds of thousands of people from one day to the next, sometimes with different rules from one state to the next. This uncertainty has significant impacts on mental health and wellbeing, and the sudden loss of status can create major disruptions to local economies.

Having access to reliable legal advice is among the most important protections against arbitrary detention or loss of status. Unlike in criminal proceedings, there is no right to government-appointed counsel in immigration court. Although having an attorney makes immigration court more efficient and improves outcomes for non-citizens from three- to five-fold, much of the federal funding for legal services, even for unaccompanied children, has ended. As fear and uncertainty increase, newcomers are more likely to fall prey to unscrupulous actors who profit off of misinformation and defraud people desperately seeking support.

State and local governments can play a critical role in ensuring that residents understand the rules and are able to benefit from the legal protections to which they are entitled. By supporting programs that provide legal services, orientation, and reliable information to non-citizens, state and local governments can ensure that people who are eligible for lawful status can remain in their communities with their families, and have proper documentation for employment.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

- ▶ Fund universal representation. Universal representation models provide the broadest guarantee that all community members will be able to exercise their due process rights and ensure that the most vulnerable maintain access to services. A recent study found that providing universal representation to people in removal proceedings in New York would allow more than 50,000 people to remain in their communities, and generate a net benefit of more than \$8 billion in tax revenues.
- ▶ Support diversified service models that can adapt to rapidly changing landscapes. With needs changing quickly, programs that provide flexibility to allow for support to detained and non-detained populations, legal orientation and full representation, and in-person and remote services will be most responsive to ongoing needs. Best practice models will incorporate holistic, client-centered services that include case management and trauma-sensitive responses.
- ▶ Provide funding to community-based organizations, especially those led by impacted populations, that can coordinate responses and triage cases. With rising demands for legal services, coordination between services providers will be fundamental.
- ▶ Offer multi-year, predictable funding models. The current uncertainty is affecting not only impacted populations, but also the organizations that serve them. Many of the country's leading immigration legal service providers have lost core funding and are struggling to keep afloat, and other organizations, including many grassroots organizations, have had to close their doors. State funding can restore stability to this ecosystem by providing predictable, scalable, multi-year grants that permit planning and investments more closely aligned with immigration case timelines.

ALTERNATIVES AND COMPROMISES

- ▶ Support legal orientation and information sharing. With the constantly shifting legal environment, misinformation can quickly spread. Fraudsters may prey upon vulnerable community members. State support for trusted outlets and legal orientation can be a powerful way to combat such misinformation and ensure community members have access reliable information.
- ▶ Create municipal-level initiatives or pilot programs in high-need jurisdictions, targeting specific populations. Fund legal support for particularly vulnerable populations like unaccompanied children, trafficking victims, or survivors of domestic violence.
- ▶ Fund naturalization services. There are an estimated 9 million lawful permanent residents living in U.S. communities who are eligible to become U.S. citizens, but have not done so. Supporting long-term residents in gaining citizenship helps build stronger communities. Naturalization is also the best protection available against detention, deportation, and family separation, as recent reports of greed card holders being targeted for immigration enforcement action are increasing. At the same time fees have increased for naturalization applications, the federal government has cut support for pro-bono naturalization services, putting this critical process out of reach for many long-term residents. States can fill this gap with dedicated funding.

STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

State & bill number	Summary/details
New York (2025) <u>A.270</u> : <i>The Access to Representation Act</i>	Would establish a universal right to counsel for indigent New Yorkers who are subject to removal proceedings under federal immigration law
Colorado (2021) <u>H.B.21-1194</u> : <i>The Immigration Legal Defense Fund</i>	Creates an immigration legal defense fund that allows the department of labor and employment to award grants to non-profit organizations providing legal advice, counseling and representation for indigent clients in immigration proceedings
Oregon (2022) <u>S.B. 1543</u> : <i>Universal Legal Representation Fund</i>	Funds the state's universal representation program to provide legal assistance for immigrants and refugees facing deportation.

ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Study the data produced by Vera Institute of Justice to strengthen your requests.
- ☐ Assess the need to focus of services that would have a higher rate of impact for impacted community members.
- ☐ Build relationships with organizations or community partners providing legal defense or support to immigrants adjusting status.
- ☐ Consider the strength of your relationships with city council members, mayors, state legislators, and governors to identify which level may be receptive to this ask.
- ☐ Research the budget proposal and allocations processes at the city or state level, as well as the primary actors involved in those processes.

- ☐ If your state or locality has already taken steps to invest in immigrant legal services consider options to strengthen or expand the program. Be prepared to offer suggestions or examples from other states and localities.
- ☐ Core tasks: craft relevant messaging; power map targets and partners; effective engagement tactics

OPTIONS FOR TARGETED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Red State Options	Consider pursuit of municipal or private funding opportunities to strengthen access to legal assistance in your community.
Purple State Options	Advocate for legislation that can create and direct monies toward a legal defense fund. This can occur at the city or state level. Funding from both a locality or state will require the identification of an administering agency through which the funds will be allocated and establishing the parameters by which the agency grants out those funds.
Blue State Options	Work with your Office of New Americans/Immigrant to advocate for the allocation of grants specifically through RFPs from grassroots, diaspora, and immigrant justice organizations.

COMMITTEE TARGETS

Oversight committees may vary widely across states and localities. Certainly, any ask involving a budget request would require approval from Budget; Appropriations; Finance; or Ways and Means. Crafting a program to serve immigrants may also involve a second committee of oversight depending on the agency charged with disbursing the funds.

COALITION BUILDING AND PARTNER TARGETS

The Vera Institute of Justice has been a national coalition leader on this issue in-state and municipalities; local alliances for justice and immigrants' rights organization; state and local bar associations and legal service providers; also consider engaging local employers.

Capitalizing on Workforce Development Opportunities

ISSUE SUMMARY

Across the U.S., refugees and other new Americans play a vital role in local workforces—making up 17.7% of the American workforce—filling critical needs in priority industries, opening businesses and contributing to the success of communities across the country. However, the skills, training and education of these newcomers are often underutilized, and opportunities to contribute where their skills are most needed can be limited.

For individuals who previously worked in credentialed, in-demand professions—health care workers and educators, for example—the process to re-credential and return to a career can be difficult due to lack of available retraining opportunities, guidance from state regulatory agencies, time and financial resources, and opportunities to demonstrate that their skills meet U.S. standards. Available solutions to increase the flexibility of workforce systems and address these obstacles include establishing a process to consider international credentials and education in applications for professional licensure; publishing guidance on pathways to professional credentialing for internationally-educated individuals; and expanding opportunities for newcomers to demonstrate that their skills meet U.S. standards.

Individuals outside of credentialed experience, such as those looking to change careers or build new skills to meet local workforce needs, may confront challenges in finding skill-building and worker mobility opportunities. Vocational training, experiential learning opportunities through apprenticeships, occupational English language classes and access to in-state tuition (see page 7) can open career pathways that do not require an occupational license, expand skill recognition and build new skills, and create opportunities for workers to advance their careers.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

- ▶ Increase flexibility in occupational credentialing to ensure that priority industries can hire skilled workers and newcomers can demonstrate that their existing skills meet or are substantially similar to U.S. standards (such as licensure by endorsement; increase accepted English language or credential evaluation methods).
- ▶ Create opportunities for employers in certain credentialed professions, such as health care, to expand the workforce by allowing internationally trained newcomers to meet professional credentialing requirements through experiential, on-the-job learning.
- ▶ Eliminate unnecessary occupational credentialing requirements that are not related to the profession's qualifications and skills.
- ▶ Meet vital workforce needs by expanding training and education opportunities for newcomers to build in-demand skills through investment in programs—such as experiential learning, workforce training, apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships, and vocational English classes.
- ▶ Consult with relevant industry professionals for context, feedback and endorsement of policies.

ALTERNATIVES & COMPROMISES

Legislative efforts may not always be possible. When that is the case, consider pursuing administrative solutions and targeted interventions that address specific occupations or industry needs.

- ▶ Consider engaging the governor to assess options to direct executive Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) funding to programs that include newcomers, as [Virginia](#) Governor Glenn Youngkin recently directed.
- ▶ [Iowa](#) dedicated resources to training recently arrived refugees to secure commercial driver's licenses and employment in trucking and transport.
- ▶ Pennsylvania's Department of State invested in a survey that asked new Pennsylvanians to share information about language access, education, employment, licensure and barriers they had experienced related to occupational licensing. The 2021 survey resulted in several [policy recommendations](#).

STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

State & bill number	Summary/details
Colorado (2022) S.B. 22-140 <i>Expansion of Experiential Learning Opportunities</i>	Creates new programs to expand skill-building opportunities and employment through digital literacy and language support.
Michigan (2023) S.B. 162 <i>Education Counseling; Reciprocity for out-of-state School Counselors</i>	Allows individuals licensed as a school counselor in another country to be granted a temporary school counselor license if they meet all requirements for a permanent credential.
Florida (2024) S.B. 7016 <i>Health Care</i>	Waives residency requirements for internationally trained doctors who meet certain requirements.
Vermont (2019) H.427 <i>An Act Relating to a Uniform Process for Foreign Credential Verification</i>	Provides broad discretion to Office of Professional Regulation to determine the equivalence of credentials of internationally trained professionals.
Oklahoma (2025) H.B.2050 <i>Professionals and Occupations; Foreign Applicants and Requirements</i>	Creates a provisional license for certain internationally trained physicians, which may become permanent after three years with approval of the state medical board.
Maine (2023) L.D. 1169 <i>An Act to Amend the Laws Government Foreign Credentialing</i>	Creates Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Grant Program Fund.
Arizona (2023) S.B. 1563 <i>Establishing the New American Talent Study Committee</i>	Establishes New American Study Committee to review best practices for the economic integration of newcomers and reducing unnecessary barriers to employment.
Oregon (2023) S.B. 849 <i>Relating to Professional Workforce</i>	Requires professional licensing boards to publish guidance on pathways to professional authorization for internationally educated individuals and waive requirements for English proficiency examination for specified internationally educated individuals.

ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Connect with impacted community members, workforce centers, and community-based organizations working with refugees and immigrants to understand specific barriers and needs.
- ☐ Consider policies states have already introduced and advanced to address immigrant and refugee integration and what barriers and opportunities still exist. Identify and connect with existing organization or coalitions supporting these efforts.
- ☐ Assess which occupations in the state require a license, registration, or certification to practice and who oversees the licensure process.
- ☐ Explore data to make a compelling and well-rounded case.
 - ☐ Gather information on existing labor shortages and impacted industries.
 - ☐ Review the skills and education levels of arriving refugees and immigrants as collected by American Immigration Coalition
- ☐ Connect with relevant state agencies (Office of New Americans, Department of Labor, Regulatory Agency) about existing priorities and work related to immigrant and refugee workforce inclusion.
- ☐ Assess whether the change you want requires a legislative act or a regulatory change by the executive.
- ☐ Core tasks: craft relevant messaging; power map targets and partners; effective engagement tactics

OPTIONS FOR TARGETED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Red State Option	Consider a multi-year process that begins with the introduction of policy to initiate a study which will assess and anticipate the state's current workforce needs; and the underutilization of immigrant and refugee talent. This helps to frame the issue through an economic lens with a specific focus on the role newcomers can play in filling critical workforce needs and contributing to the state's economic success.
Purple State Option	Policies that address regulatory obstacles to re-credentialing and promote increased understanding and recognition of skills, experience, and training obtained outside of the U.S.
Blue State Option	Invest in programs that promote skill building and occupational language acquisition through training, grants, or other programs specifically targeted at internationally trained individuals.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE TARGETS

Committees involved with workforce and credentialing in any given state can be wide ranging depending on the industry OR be channeled through a single committee addressing workforce issues broadly. A phone call to the committee staff for any of the following similarly labeled committees in your state should answer the question: **Business & Labor Affairs, Commerce, Economic Development, Regulated Industries, Industry & Labor, Economic Growth, and Education**. For initiatives that require funding, Appropriations Committee outreach should also be prioritized.

COALITION BUILDING AND PARTNER TARGETS

In addition to working alongside impacted immigrant and refugee populations, the following targets should be considered:

- ▶ National networks such as World Education Services, Niskanen, and even state specific coalitions are active on this issue.
- ▶ For any changes targeting credentialing processes and licensure be sure to align with the occupational licensing boards in your state inclusive of occupation-specific societies, and professional groups.
- ▶ If you are pursuing a policy specific to a single career path, open discourse with employers in that field to ensure alignment and support.
- ▶ General workforce inclusion and opportunity work should include workforce development boards, job readiness training programmatic staff, local workforce centers or other entities supported through federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) funding, higher education and vocational training institutes, and relevant employer groups or associations.

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- ▶ Austyn Smith, U.S. Advocacy Officer

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover and rebuild their lives. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

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