

# New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey



*December 2021*

## Results & Analysis



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# Executive Summary

Immigrants, refugees, and asylees are among those disproportionately impacted by occupational licensure policy in Pennsylvania. These individuals often face difficulty demonstrating that the education and professional experience they attained in other countries meet the state's licensure requirements. They also encounter barriers navigating the state occupational license application process and website, leading to frustration among applicants, sometimes leading them to giving up on a career they have years of experience in. Removing these roadblocks and creating more opportunities for foreign-trained individuals is imperative to growing Pennsylvania's workforce and sustaining our economy.

In order to study the effects of occupational licensing as it relates to foreign-trained individuals in the Commonwealth, the Department of State launched the *New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey* in February 2021. The survey, housed on the Department's website, studied responses from nearly 500 immigrants, refugees, and asylees who hold a Pennsylvania occupational license or applied for one in the past. Survey questions focused on topics such as language access, education, employment, licensure portability, and barriers related to occupational licensing.

## Major findings from the survey included:

- 1.** The most commonly found barrier to licensure within the target group is that the application process is confusing and the license application website is not user-friendly, thus leading to frustrated licensees and denied applicants who must start the process over or who give up entirely.
- 2.** Applicants denied occupational licensure cited "the use of an incorrect form or unaccepted document when submitting their application" and "foreign education not being accepted as a qualification for licensure" as the main reasons given by the licensing authority for denial of their application.
- 3.** Respondents reported taking such steps as furthering their education and gaining more work experience in order to qualify for Pennsylvania licensing standards.
- 4.** The top language access barrier reported was applicants not being given the option to take their licensing exam in their native language or to have an interpreter assist them during the exam.

## The above findings led to the development of the following recommendations:

- 1.** Establish an Office of New Americans to assist in the creation of a welcoming environment for Pennsylvania's immigrants and refugees by supporting their economic, civic, and social integration including removing barriers to professional licensing.
- 2.** Improve the license application website in order to enhance user-experience and address the uncertainty that exists within the application process.
- 3.** Promote further recognition of training, education, and experience acquired in other countries.
- 4.** Ask the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services for a waiver of Social Security Number requirements on licensure applications.

# Introduction

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is home to nearly 1 million foreign-born residents and has one of the largest foreign-born populations in the United States. In fact, Pennsylvania ranks 12th in the nation in foreign-born resident population with over 930,000 immigrants, refugees, and asylees, which constitutes over 7 percent of the state's population.<sup>1</sup> Further, immigrants account for 9 percent of the state's labor force. As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of Pennsylvania's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all Pennsylvanians. Much of Pennsylvania's future economic success relies on the state's growing immigrant population.

With an increasing rate of globalization and rapid advancements in communication and transportation over recent years, more people are moving between countries than ever before. Immigrants often come to the United States to create better lives for themselves and support their families. Yet for many skilled immigrants this is often an idealistic goal, since there are many barriers to employment that prevent these individuals from working in their professional fields.

For instance, a survey of 4,000 college educated immigrants by IMPRINT and WES Global Talent Bridge found that the top barriers to practicing their profession were:<sup>2</sup>

- They lacked U.S. work experience (47 percent of respondents).
- The employer did not recognize foreign work experience (40 percent).
- The employer did not recognize foreign credentials (35 percent).

The timing of this study could not be more critical, given the numerous barriers related to occupational licensure for foreign-born workers and their families. Intensifying language access issues, the inability to have credentials (such as education and professional training) recognized as meeting standards for occupational licensure and employment qualifications, and confusion surrounding the licensure application process are all challenges that foreign-born and trained workers face.

Improving the overall application process and reducing the impact of these barriers to licensure will ease the burden on immigrants, refugees, and asylees in their pursuit of a Pennsylvania occupational license. The results from this research will be used to craft legislative and policy recommendations specifically designed to promote better employment opportunities and remove barriers to occupational licensure for foreign-born residents in their pursuit of a new life in Pennsylvania. Easing unduly licensing requirements would encourage more foreign-born workers to relocate to Pennsylvania, which would reduce unemployment levels, fill provider gaps in certain professions, and contribute to the state's tax base and economic development strategy.

This effort to ease licensure requirements came as a result of Governor Tom Wolf's signing of Executive Order 2017-03: *Review of State Professional and Occupational Licensure Board Requirements and Processes*.<sup>3</sup> The order required the Pennsylvania Department of State (DOS) - Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs (BPOA), which oversees professional licensure, to conduct a comprehensive review of the state's processes, fees, training requirements, criminal history policies, reciprocity or interstate agreements, and continuing education requirements for occupational and professional licensure.

[1]<https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants-current-data/>

[2] <https://knowledge.wes.org/wes-research-report-career-outcomes>

[3]<https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/eo/Documents/2017-03.pdf>

# Introduction

BPOA was established in 1963 as part of the Department of State to provide support services to 29 professional and occupational licensing boards and commissions. The Department provides these boards and commissions with legal, technical and administrative support to conduct written practical licensure examinations; review and verify education and experience of candidates for licensure; certify providers of education; receive and investigate public complaints; conduct periodic facility inspections; prosecute, adjudicate, fine and sanction violators; administer licensure programs; revise standards for licensure to keep pace with changes in the professions; and advise the legislature on proposed statutory changes.

A review of the state's processes related to licensure portability resulted in legislative action, specifically the signing of Act 41 of 2019,<sup>4</sup> which provides for the endorsement of licensed professionals credentialed in other states, with substantially equivalent requirements and no disciplinary history, so they may acquire a Pennsylvania license. The act also provides for the use of provisional licenses based upon each licensing board's discretion.

Prior to this reform, many professionals licensed out-of-state had to complete Pennsylvania's entire licensing process, even if they already met all of the requirements. The time-consuming delays caused individuals moving to Pennsylvania to lose income and career opportunities and reduced the pool of talented workers. With the signing of Act 41, a sensible and efficient path to obtain occupational licensure was created that goes beyond existing options for licensure by endorsement or reciprocity.

Another legislative achievement that grew from the review of Pennsylvania's licensure requirements was the signing of Act 53 of 2020,<sup>5</sup> which made sweeping changes to the occupational licensing rules that govern the use of criminal history information in determining whether to grant, deny, suspend, or revoke a professional license. Act 53 requires BPOA's licensing boards and commissions to consider whether the crime for which an individual was convicted is "directly related" to the profession or occupation for which licensure is sought, or whether, based on the nature of the criminal conviction, licensure of the individual would pose a substantial risk to the health and safety of the individuals' clients, patients or the public or a substantial risk of further criminal convictions.

This report continues to build on progress made from the Governor's order as the Commonwealth aims to identify opportunities to remove unnecessary restrictions that prevent Pennsylvanians from gaining employment in a licensed profession.

The New Pennsylvanian's Licensure study was conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of State, with assistance from the Welcoming Center and World Education Services, and support from the Governor's Office. The Welcoming Center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia that promotes inclusive economic growth through immigrant integration. World Education Services is a 501(c)3 nonprofit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in the U.S. and Canada. (6,7)

[4]<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2019&sessInd=0&act=41>

[5] <https://www.dos.pa.gov/ProfessionalLicensing/Pages/ACT-53-2020.aspx#>

[6]<https://welcomingcenter.org/>

[7]<https://www.wes.org/>

# Methodology & Objectives

In order to understand the experiences and needs of new Pennsylvanians, the Department conducted a study of immigrants, refugees, and asylees who either hold a Pennsylvania occupational license or applied for one in the past and were denied. The survey consisted of 20 - 30 multiple choice and open-ended questions depending on the survey path taken, which was determined by each individual's responses throughout the survey. The survey asked about topics such as language access, education, employment, licensure portability, and barriers related to occupational licensing.

The survey collected qualitative and quantitative data on professionally licensed members of the immigrant, refugee, and asylee community, and also collected information on foreign-born individuals who may have been denied when applying for licensure in the past. An analysis of the survey data was performed in order to have a stronger understanding on the effects occupational licensing has on foreign-born workers. Acknowledging the challenges that foreign-born workers face will result in policy reform that creates a more efficient process for these professionals. Feedback from survey participants will be used to develop recommendations to assist the immigrant, refugee and asylee communities in obtaining professional licensure in Pennsylvania.

For a complete listing of the questions asked in the survey, please see Appendix A.

## Data Collection

The marketing strategy utilized to recruit survey participants included a combination of press releases, social media and website promotion, and advertising by our partners (The Welcoming Center & World Education Services). To announce the launch of the New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey, DOS issued a press release to media outlets (See Appendix B) and published nearly a dozen social media posts on Department of State social media promoting the survey to the public.

In addition to the efforts above, the Welcoming Center & World Education Services sent out multiple social media posts, e-mail blasts, and website notifications to their constituents with information about the goals of the survey and the link in order to participate. The Department also received assistance from other state agencies, such as the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Human Services, as both agencies assisted with circulating the survey to the populations they serve.

The New Pennsylvanians Survey<sup>8</sup> was launched on the Department of State's website in February 2021 and collected responses through the end of July 2021. The target group of participants were members of the immigrant, refugee, or asylee community who either hold a Pennsylvania occupational license or applied for one in the past and were denied. The survey was administered electronically using SurveyMonkey software. Respondents completed the survey through a survey link provided online through the DOS website or by one of our partners' messaging.

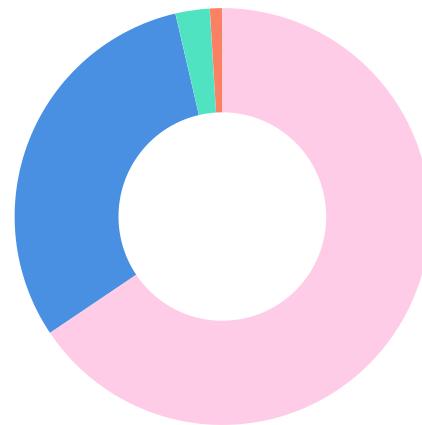
[8] <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NewPALicenseSurvey>

# Respondent Profile

Any participant of immigrant, refugee, or asylee status that indicated they had applied for an occupational license in Pennsylvania were invited to take the survey. Participants were initially asked if they ever applied for a Pennsylvania occupational license. Those who responded "Yes" to that question were then categorized into the "target group" for this study. Those in the target group were asked focused questions relative to their experience with the licensing process and about any barriers that they may have encountered along the way. The target group included a total of 434 foreign-born individuals. Below is a profile of the individuals included in the target group.

## Gender of Respondents

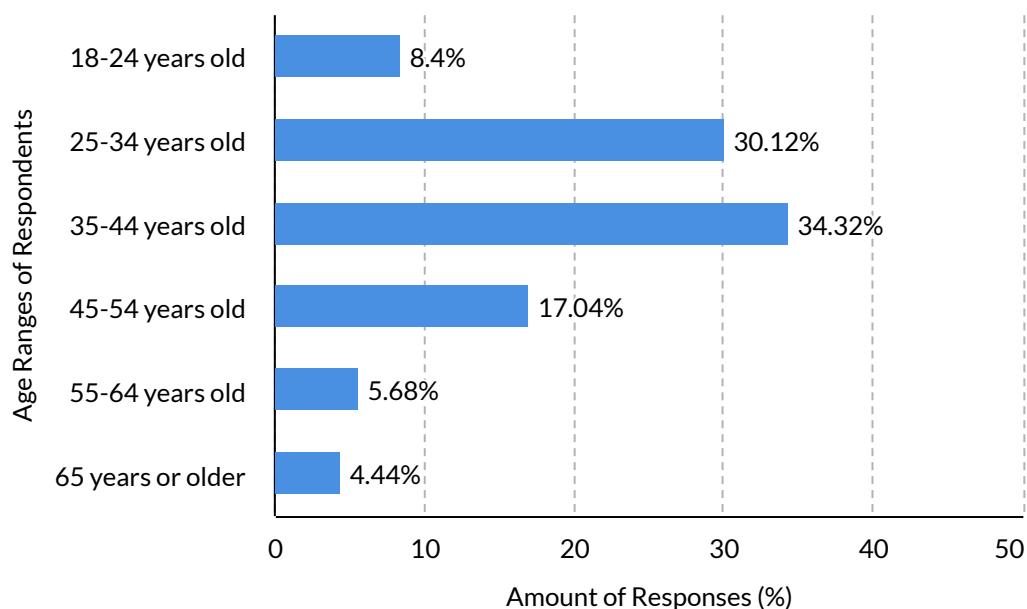
Nearly two-thirds of respondents identify as female.



Female (65.58%) Male (30.8%) Prefer not to say (2.65%)  
Non-Binary (0.96%)

## Age of Respondents

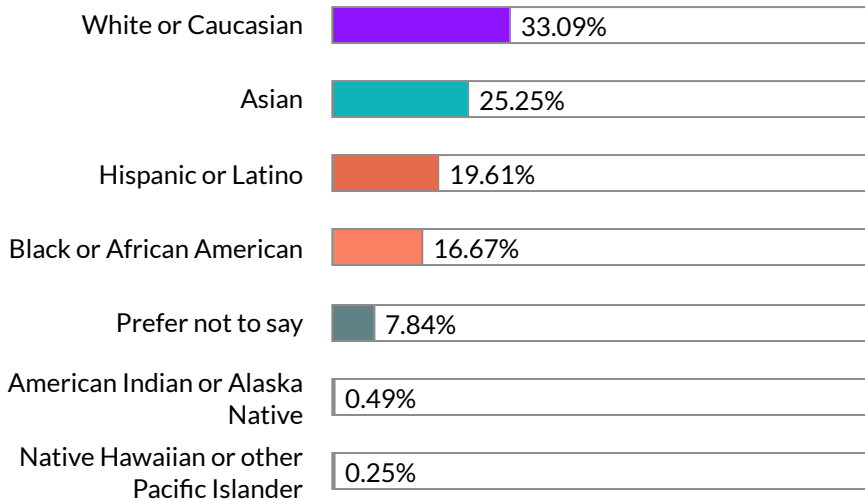
Over one-third of respondents were 35-44 years of age, while thirty percent answered that they were 25-34 years old.





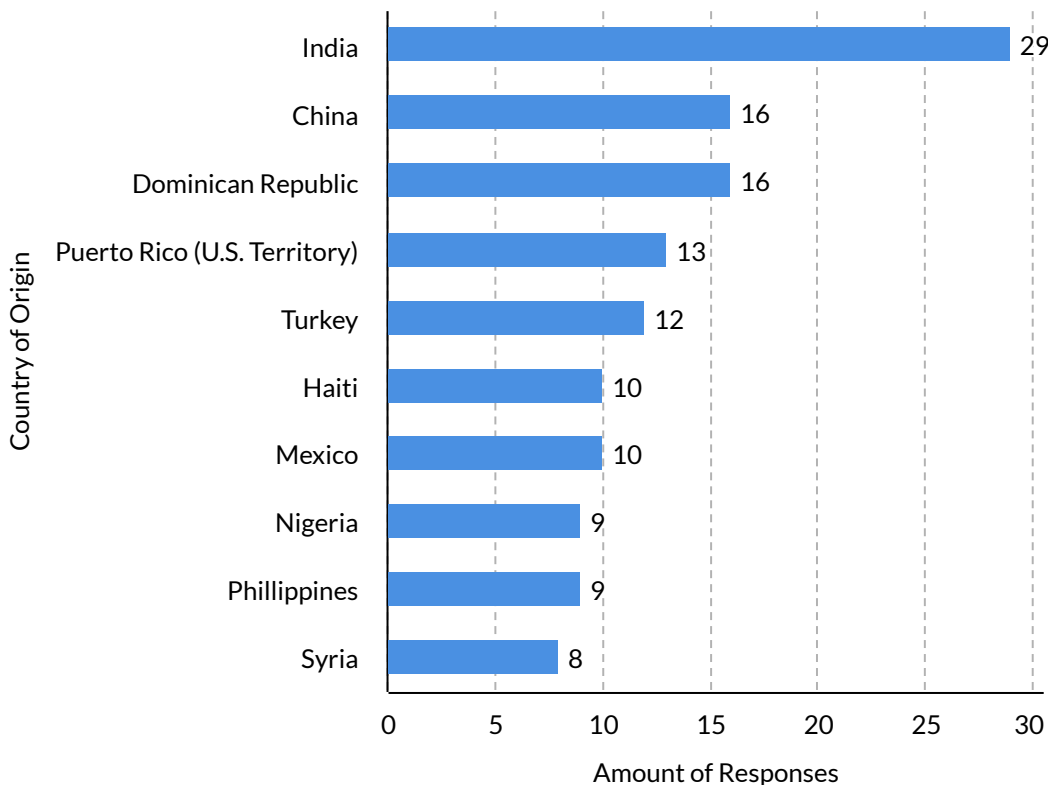
# Respondent Profile

## Race of Respondents



As the chart to the left displays, a diverse group of individuals responded to this study.

## Country of Origin



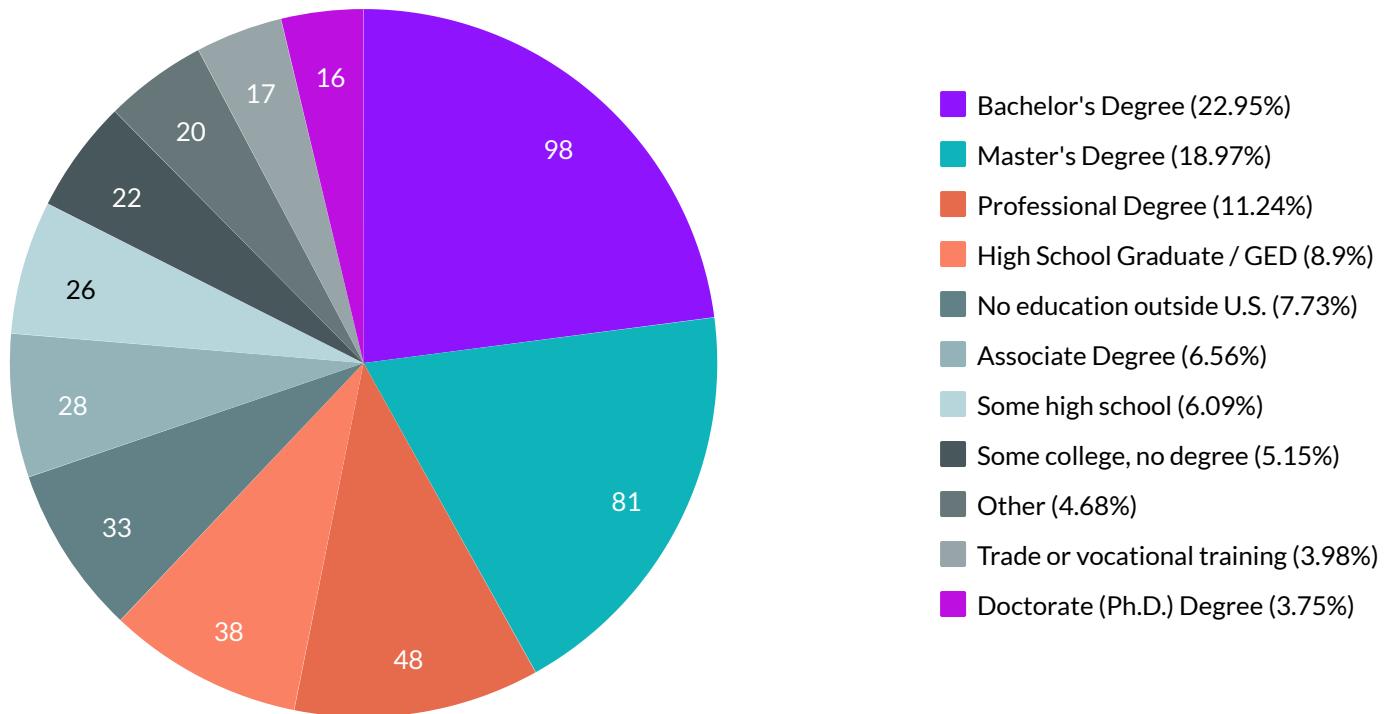
This graph displays the top 10 countries of where our respondent group moved from to come to the United States.



# Education Profile

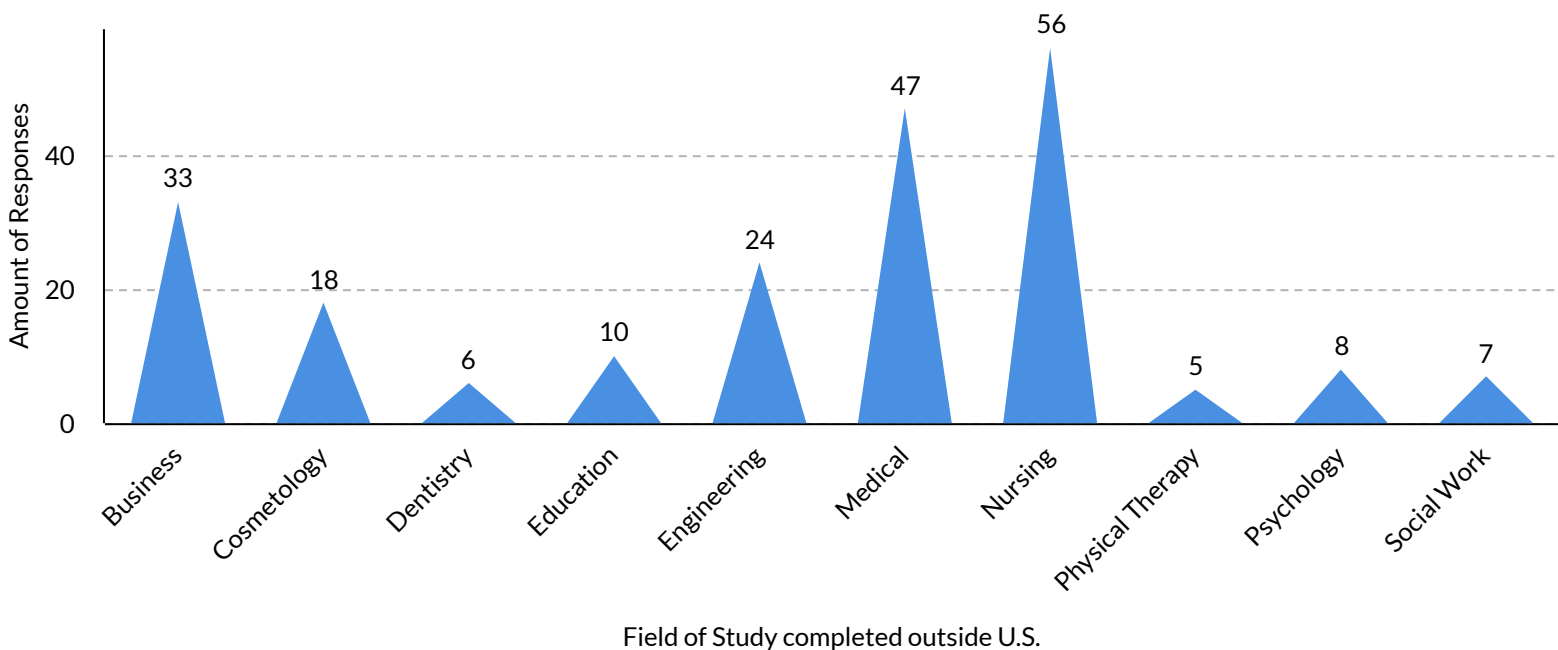
## Level of Schooling completed outside of U.S.

Out of 427 responses to this question asking their level of schooling completed outside of the U.S., the pie chart displays that Bachelor's, Master's and Professional Degrees are among the top degrees attained by participants.



## Field of Study outside of U.S.

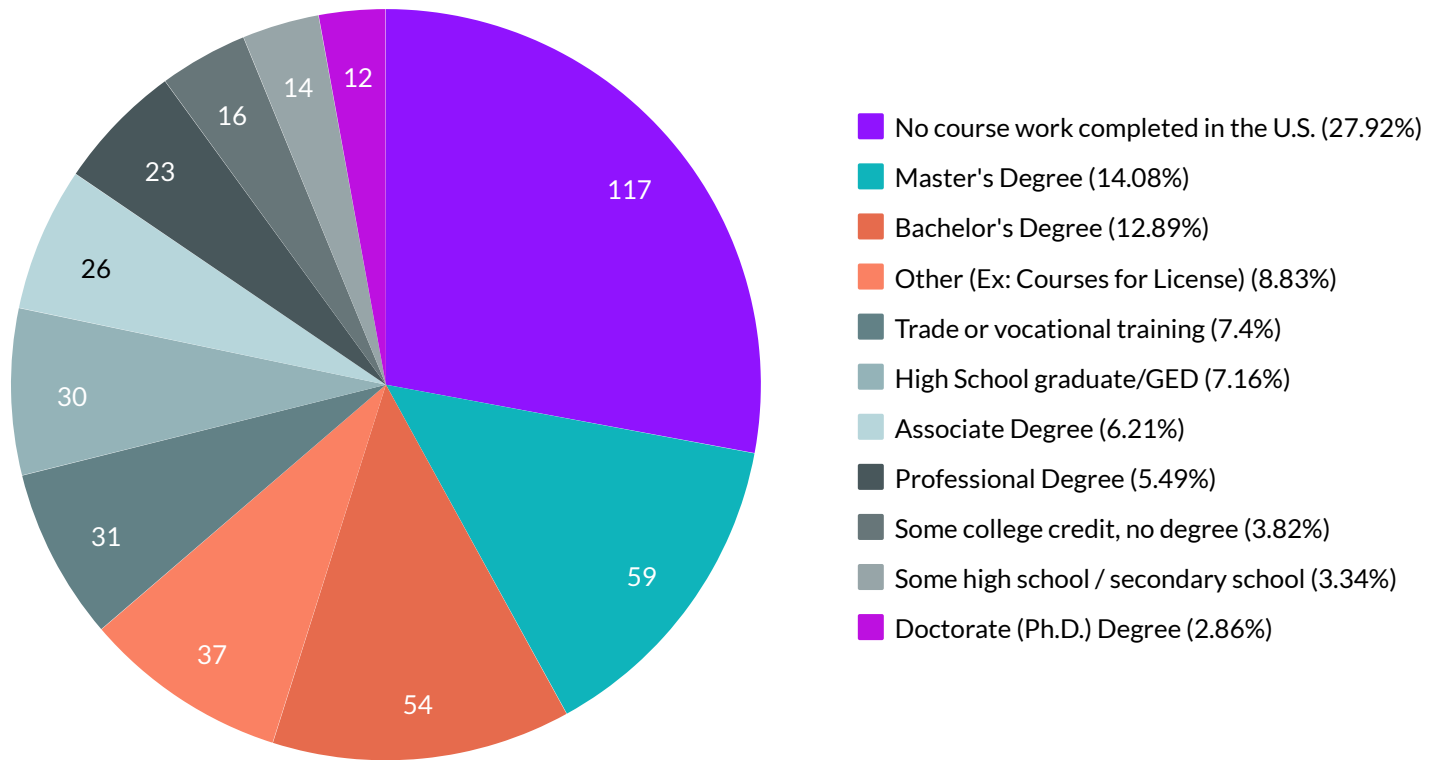
Out of 295 responses to this question asking the field of study for those who completed education abroad, the area graph displays the most popular fields as Nursing, Medical, Business (such as Accounting and Real Estate), and Engineering. Cosmetology was the most popular field for trade or vocational training.



# Education Profile

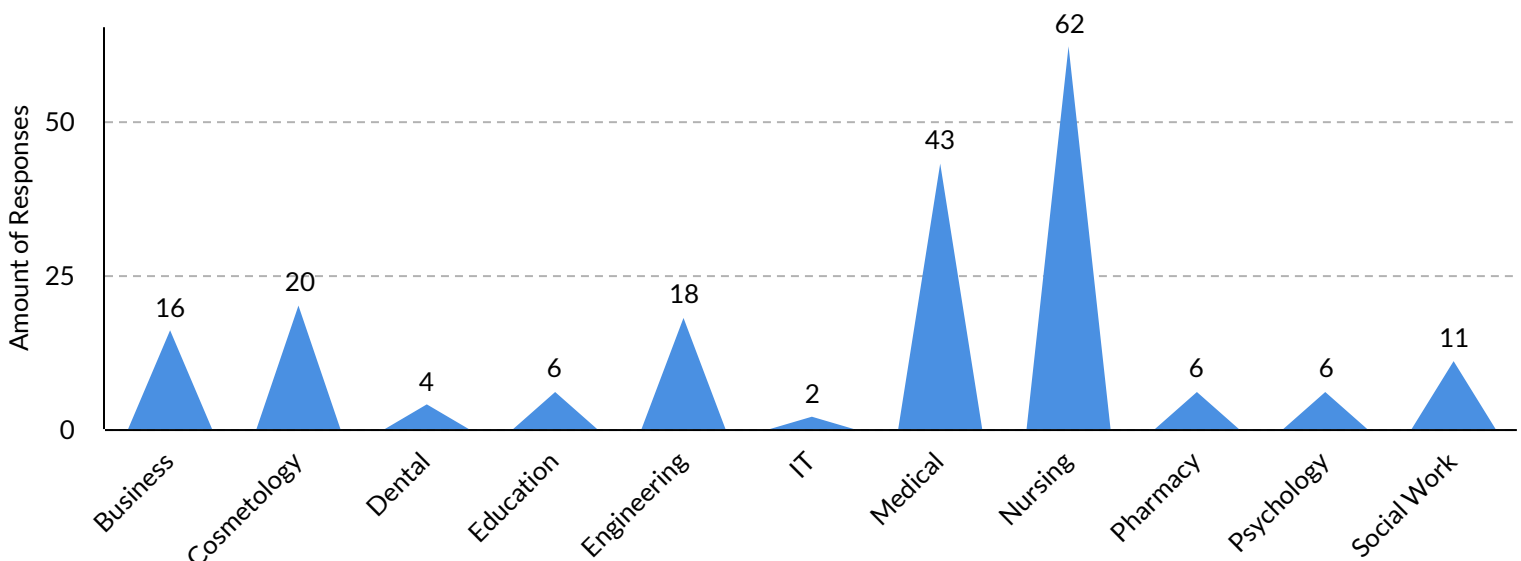
## Level of Schooling completed in the U.S.

Out of 419 responses to the question asking about level of schooling completed in the U.S., the pie chart displays that nearly 28% of foreign-born respondents did not complete course work in the U.S., while another quarter of respondents either completed a Master's or Bachelor's Degree in the U.S.



## Field of Study in the U.S.

Out of 244 responses to this question asking the field of study for those who completed education in the U.S., the area graph displays the most popular fields as Nursing, Medical, and Engineering. Cosmetology was the most popular field for trade or vocational training.



Field of Study completed outside U.S.

# Denied Applicants

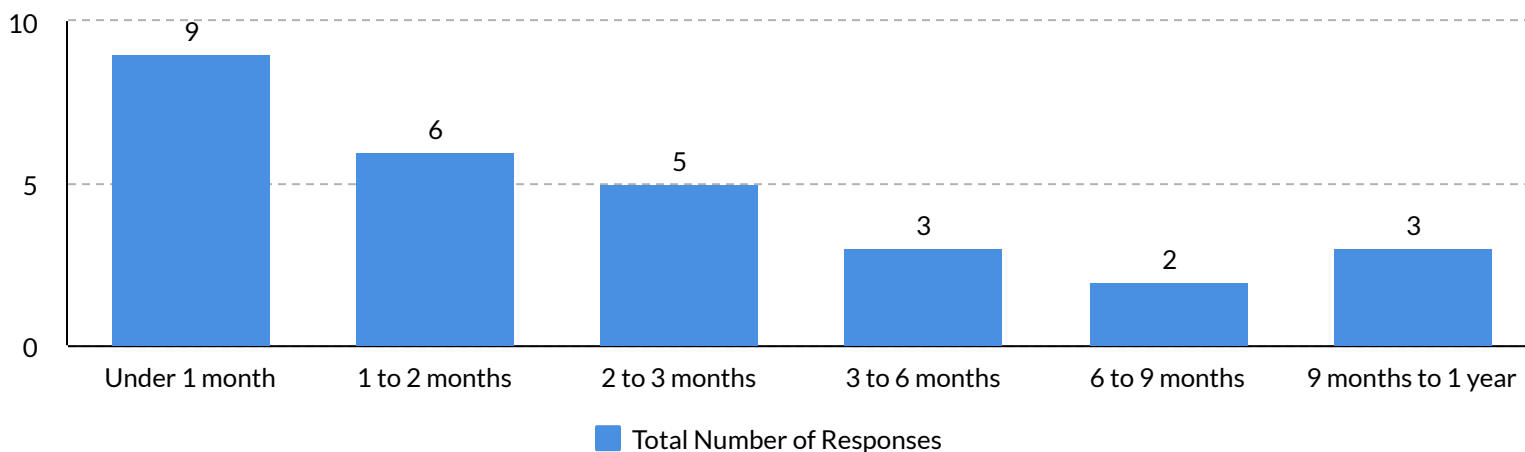
Fifty-four participants indicated that their application was denied when applying for a Pennsylvania occupational license. These individuals were asked a series of questions specifically regarding their denial, including the reason given for denial as well as the field of licensure the respondent applied for.

First, the "denied applicants" were asked for the reason given to them from the licensing board as to why their application was denied. The most reported reasons for an application denial include:

- The use of an incorrect form or unaccepted document by the applicant when submitting their application;
- An applicant's foreign education not being accepted as a qualification for licensure;
- Issues with an applicant's criminal history; and
- Applicant's failure of an English language proficiency examination

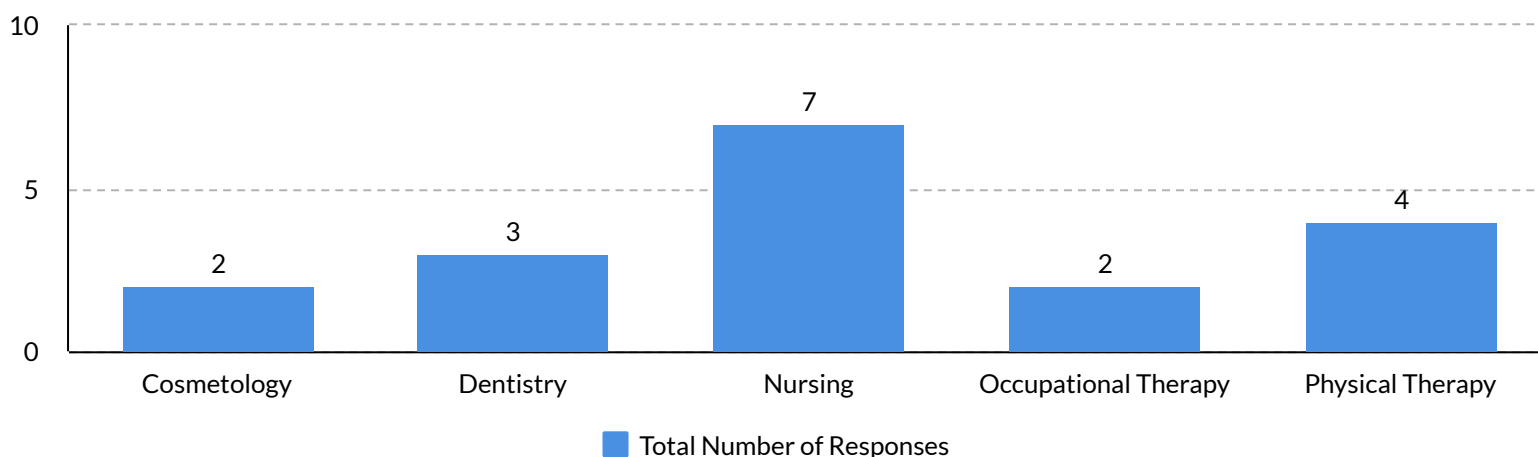
Next, this group was asked how long it took for them to receive their denial notification after applying for licensure. As displayed in the graph below, the most frequent response was under 1 month.

### Length of Time to receive Application Denial



Lastly, the denied applicants were asked what field they were applying to become licensed in. As shown in the graph below, most denials were applicants applying to the State Boards of Nursing and Physical Therapy.

### Field of Licensure for Denied Applicants



# Language Access Profile

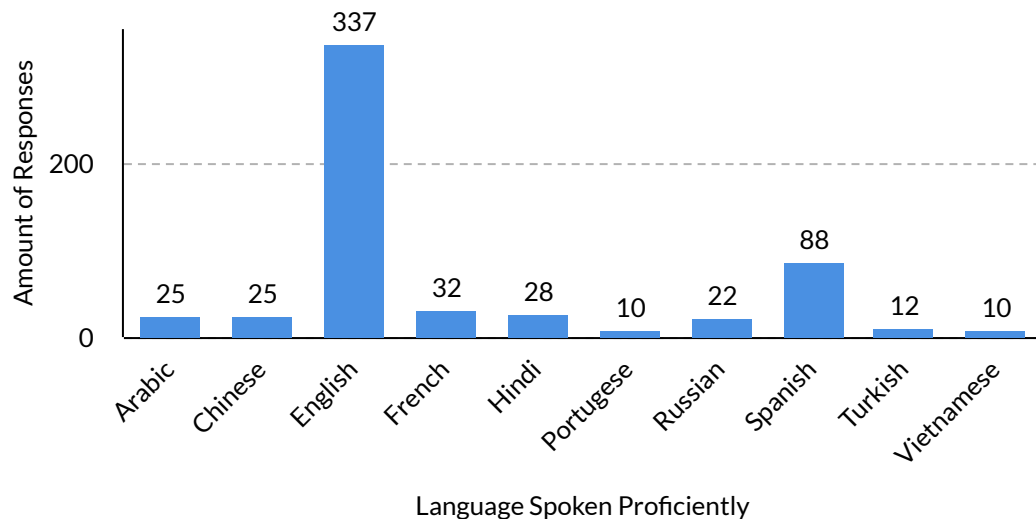
DOS recognizes the importance of being able to communicate effectively with individuals including those with limited English proficiency (LEP). LEP individuals are persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who may have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. "Language access" is defined as providing LEP individuals with reasonable access to the same services as English-speaking individuals.

According to estimates by the US Census Bureau, over 1.3 million Pennsylvania residents speak a language other than English at home.<sup>9</sup> The most common foreign languages spoken in Pennsylvania are Spanish (634,935 speakers) and Chinese (including its dialects) (90,890 speakers).<sup>10</sup>

Below is a profile of survey respondents displaying which languages they speak and their level of English proficiency.

## Languages Spoken by Respondents

Out of 418 responses to the question asking which languages were spoken proficiently by survey participants, the graph displays the top 10 languages identified. Respondents were asked to select all languages that they are proficient in.

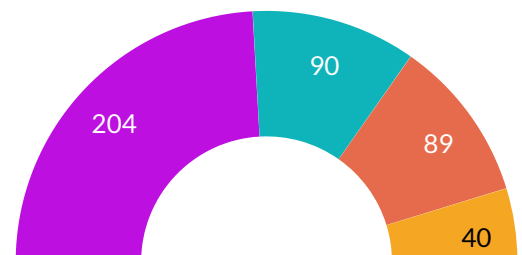


## Level of English Proficiency

Out of 423 responses to the question asking the participant's ability to speak English, nearly half (48%) rated themselves as "Proficient Speakers".

- Proficient Speaker (48.23%)
- Advanced Speaker (21.28%)
- Intermediate Speaker (21.04%)
- Beginner (9.46%)

## English Language Level



[9] US Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

[10] <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

# Language Access Profile

As shown in the chart on the prior page, nearly one-third of respondents rate themselves as a beginner or intermediate speaker of English. Without proper language assistance, limited English proficient individuals may be discouraged from applying for occupational licensure. Every effort should be made by the Department to expand language access and remove barriers for those with limited English proficiency applying for licensure.

However, forty-three (43) respondents reported that they encountered language access barriers when attempting to apply for an occupational license. The respondents were then asked about the type of barriers experienced. The chart below displays the most common language access barriers that were found to prevent LEP individuals from obtaining an occupational license. Respondents (43 in total) had the option to select more than one response to this question or provide their own response.

Type of Language Barrier encountered	Amount of Responses
The applicant was not given the option to take their licensing examination in their native language or have an interpreter assist them.	24
The applicant did not understand the requirements for licensure or the applicant reported a confusing application process.	18
The applicant encountered problems with the translation or interpretation services provided by the licensing authority.	10

Respondents in the target group were also asked if they were required to take an English proficiency examination as a condition for occupational licensure. Sixty respondents, nearly 15% of the target group, reported having to take an examination. Below is a collection of findings among this subgroup of participants (Applicants who were required to take an English proficiency examination for licensure):

- The most common fields of licensure for these individuals include Nursing and Dentistry.
- 43% of individuals rated themselves as "proficient" English speakers, while 33% rated themselves as "advanced" and 24% rated as either "beginner" or intermediate".

Out of the 60 respondents who were required to take an English proficiency examination, 46 individuals indicated they had passed the examination, while 14 applicants did not pass, thus leaving these individuals ineligible to receive a license.

Below is a collection of findings among this subgroup of participants (Applicants who failed the English proficiency examination for licensure) :

- The most common languages spoken by those who failed the English proficiency examination include Spanish, Russian, and Turkish.
- Half of the respondents rated themselves as "proficient" or "advanced" English speakers, while the other half rated themselves as "beginner" or "intermediate" English speakers.
- The most common licensure field pursued by this group was Veterinary Medicine.

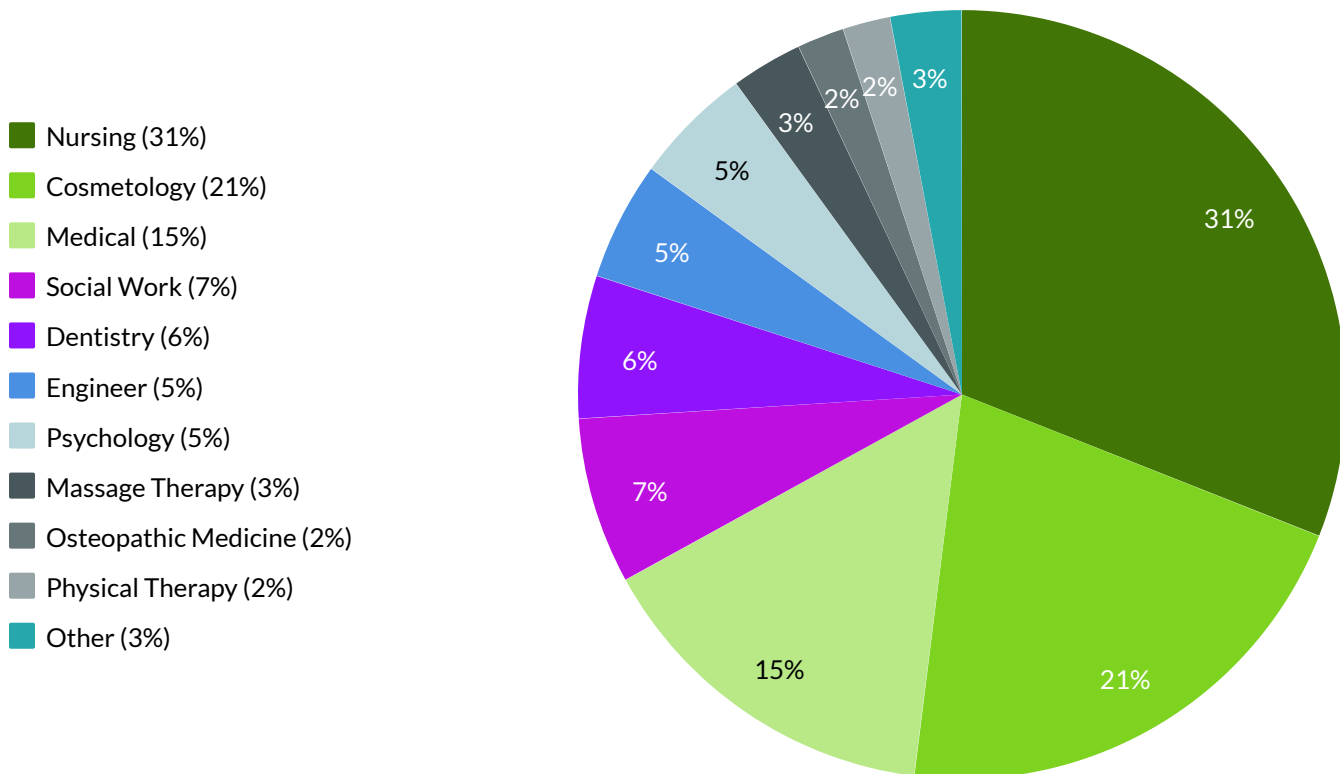
# Active Licensee Profile

Exactly 200 participants in the target group indicated that they currently hold a Pennsylvania occupational license.

The pie chart below displays the nine most popular licensure fields of respondents who indicated that they currently hold a license.

Nursing, Cosmetology, and Medical professionals made up two-thirds of the respondents.

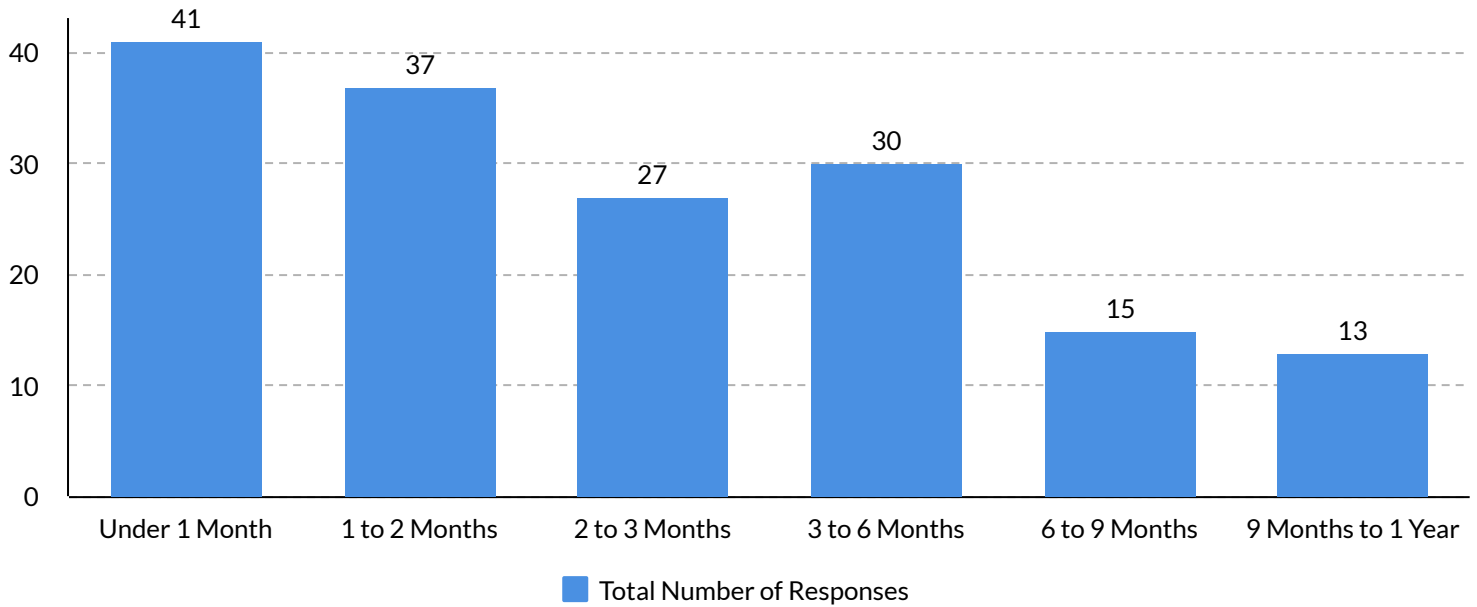
## Most Popular License Fields



# Active Licensee Profile

## Amount of time to receive PA license after applying

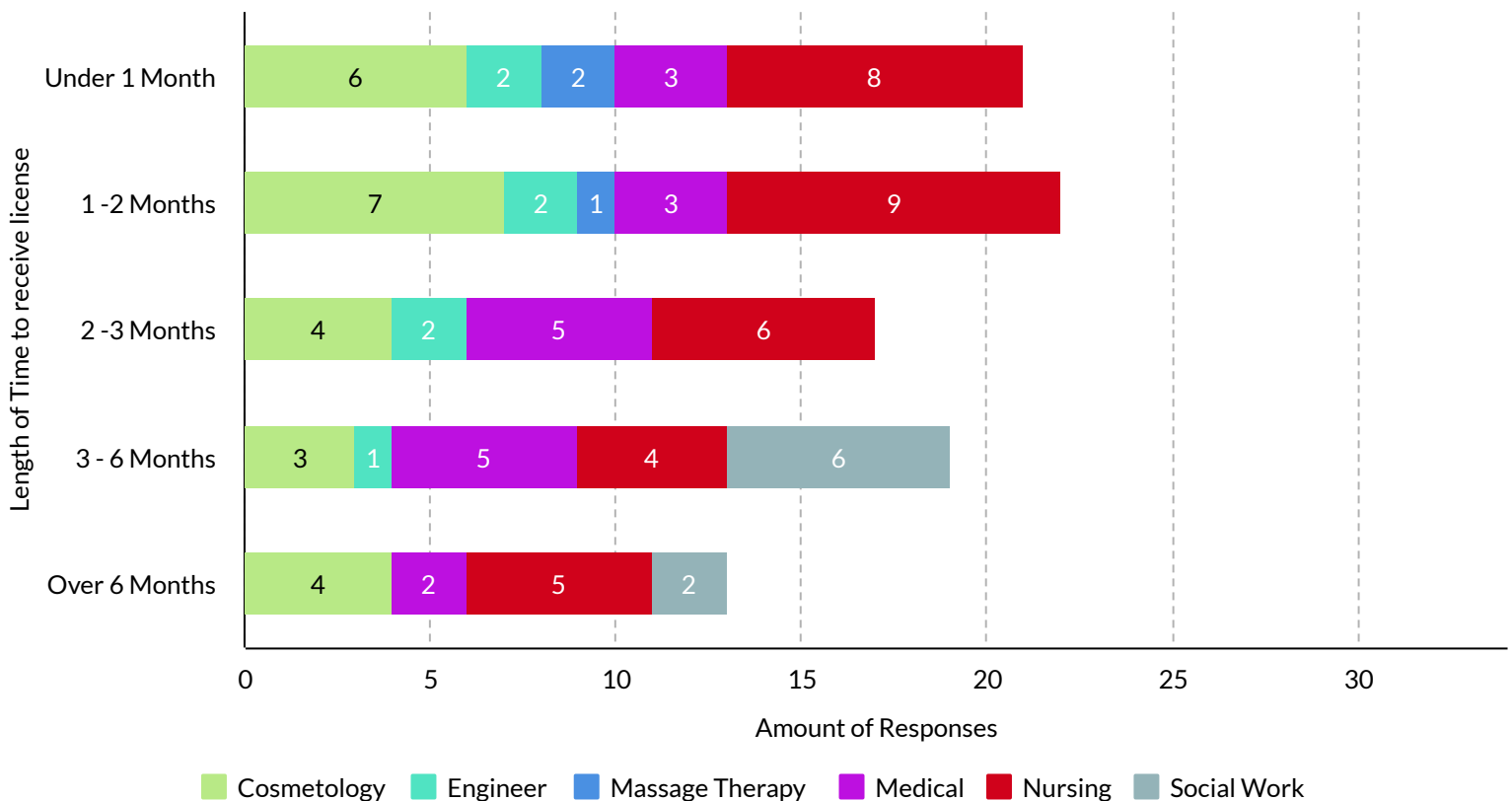
The most popular response (over 25%) indicates that licensees received their Pennsylvania occupational license within 1 month of submitting their application.



## Amount of time to receive PA license by Profession

The chart below presents the amount of time it took for licensees, categorized by the most popular professions identified by respondents, to receive their PA license.

The majority of licensees received their license within 1 month, with Cosmetology and Nursing professionals reporting the most in that time span.

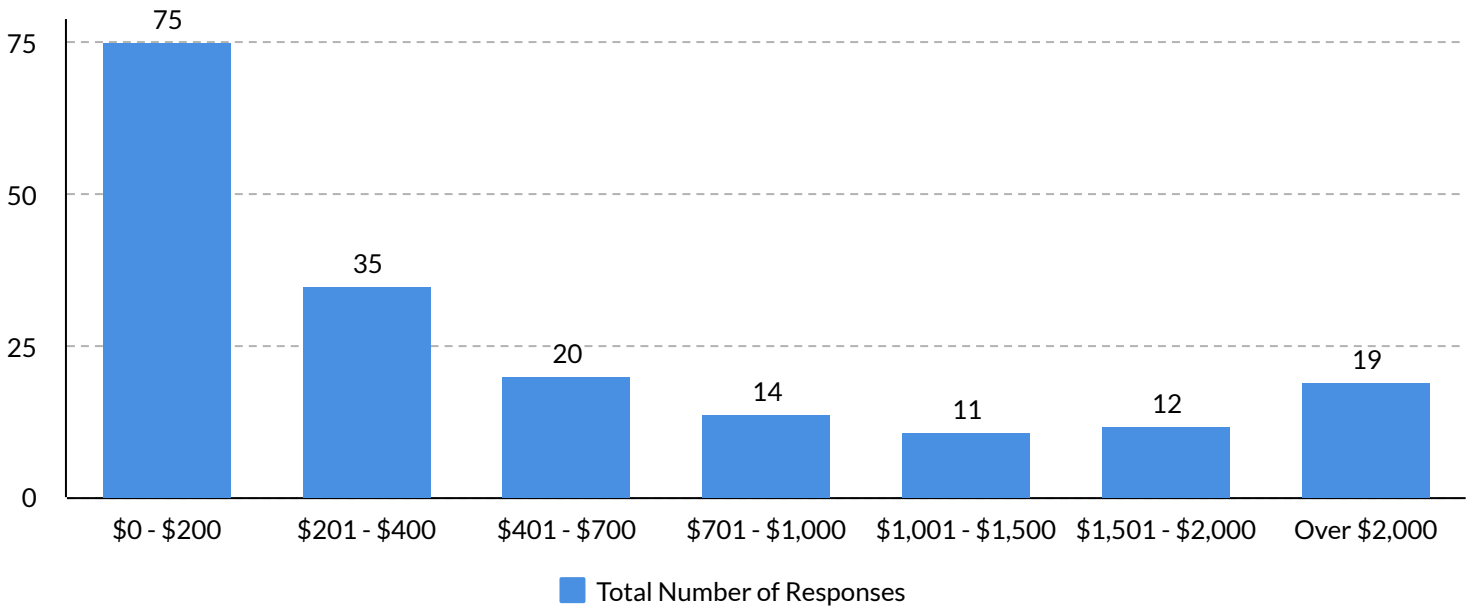




# Active Licensee Profile

## Initial Licensing Expenses

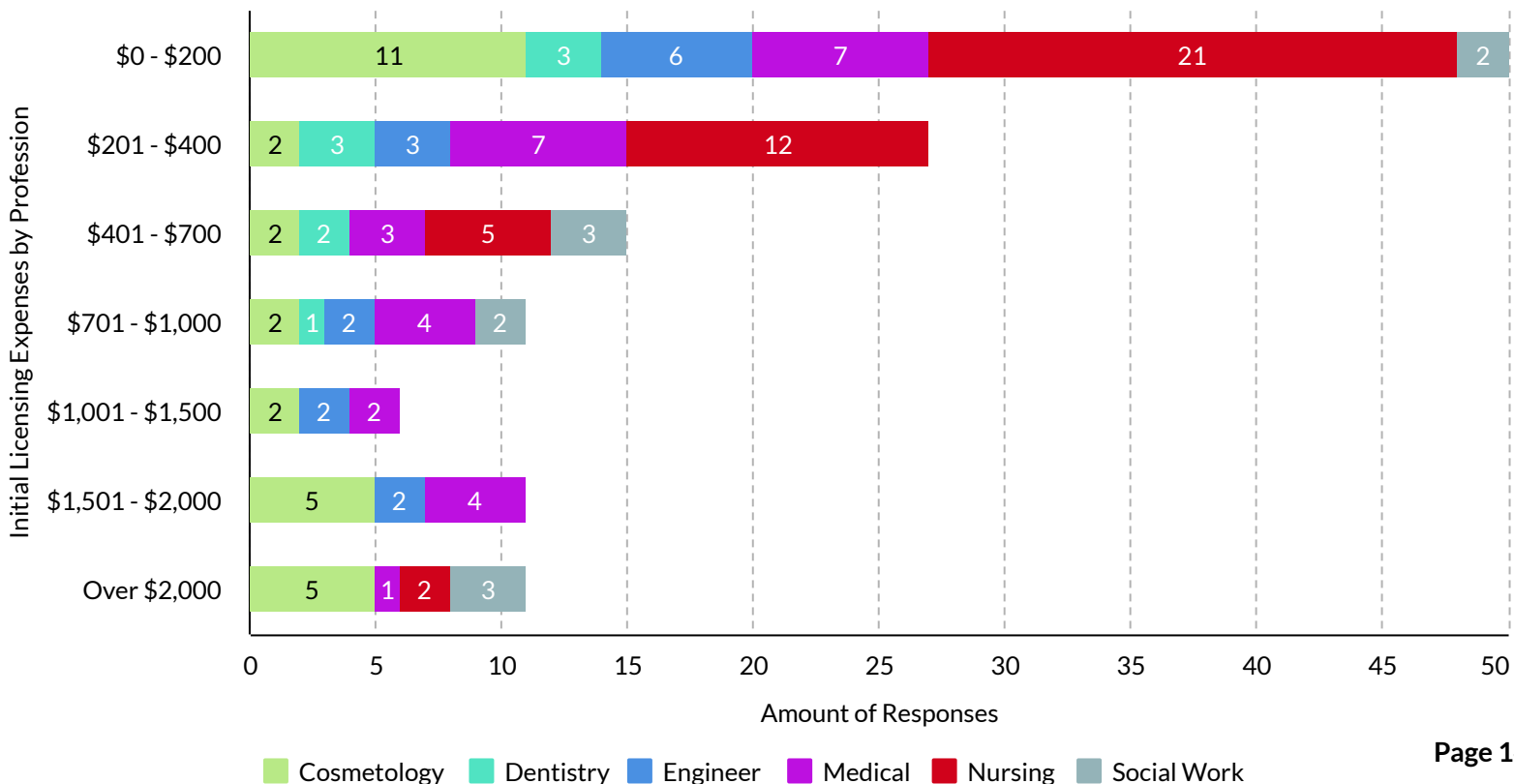
The majority of respondents noted that they spent under \$200 in initial licensing expenses. Respondents were asked to consider licensing fees, exam fees, language training courses, and any training certification courses taken that were required for licensure when calculating the figure.



## Initial Licensing Expenses by Profession

The chart below presents initial licensing expenses, categorized by the most popular professions identified by respondents, for licensees when obtaining their license.

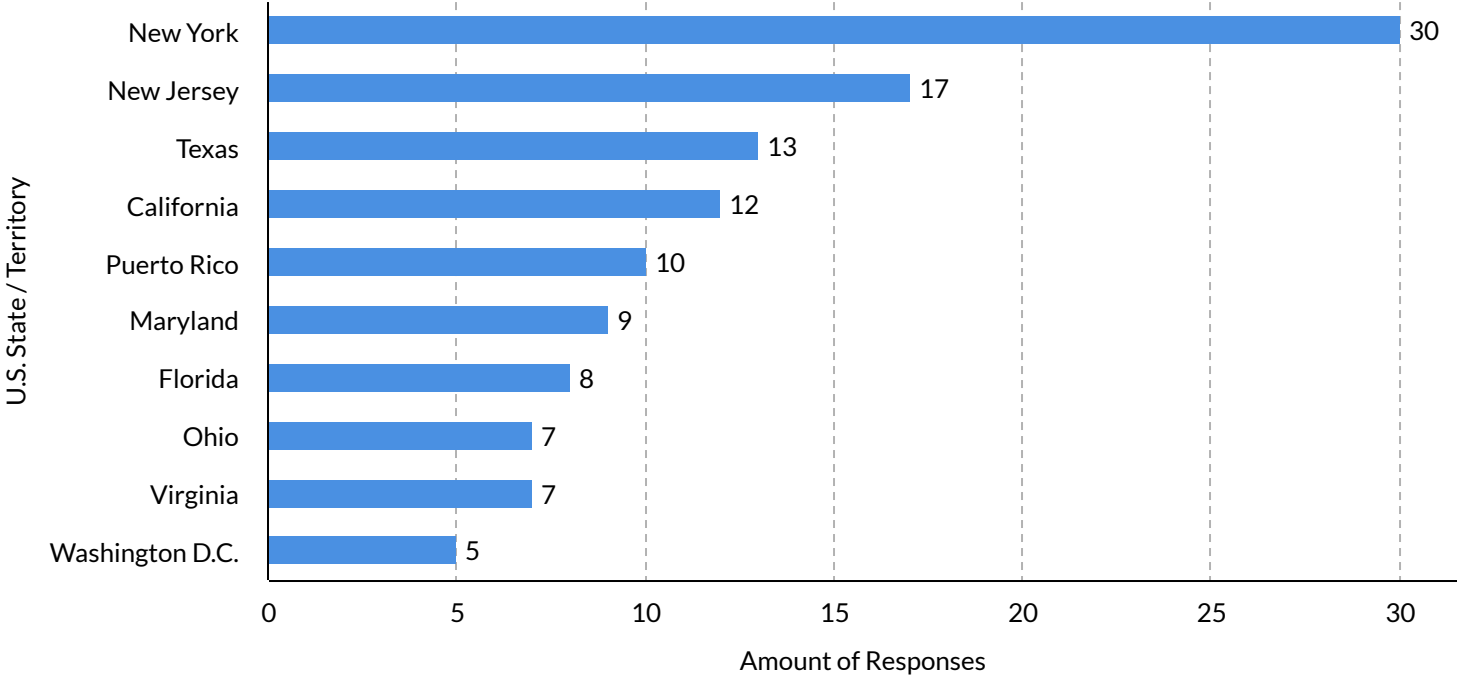
Most respondents spent under \$200 to obtain their initial occupational license, with Nurses and Cosmetologists reporting the most in the \$0 - \$200 range.



# Licensees from Other Jurisdictions

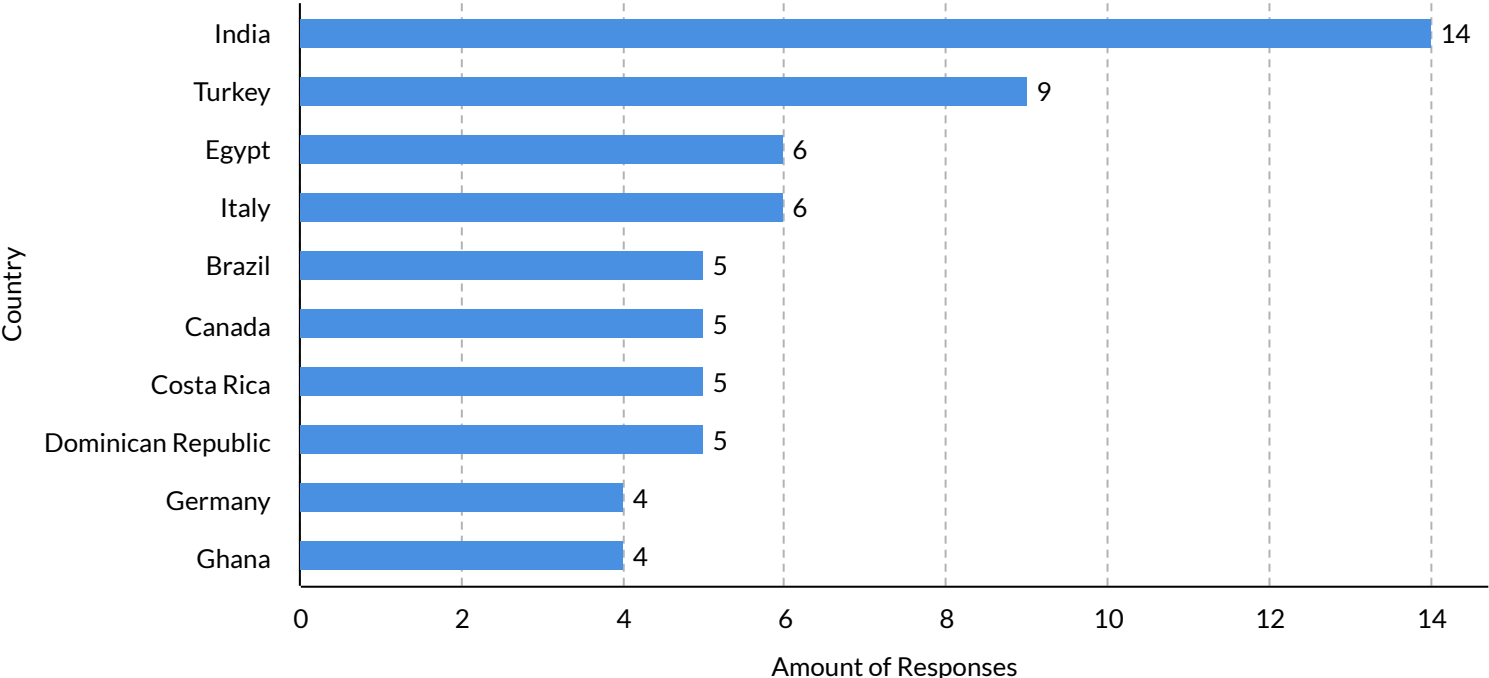
321 participants from the target group reported that they held an occupational license in another state, territory, or country prior to moving to Pennsylvania.

Participants held licenses in 33 states and U.S. territories (including Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico), the chart below displays the 10 most popular states and U.S. territories that respondents held a license in before relocating to Pennsylvania.



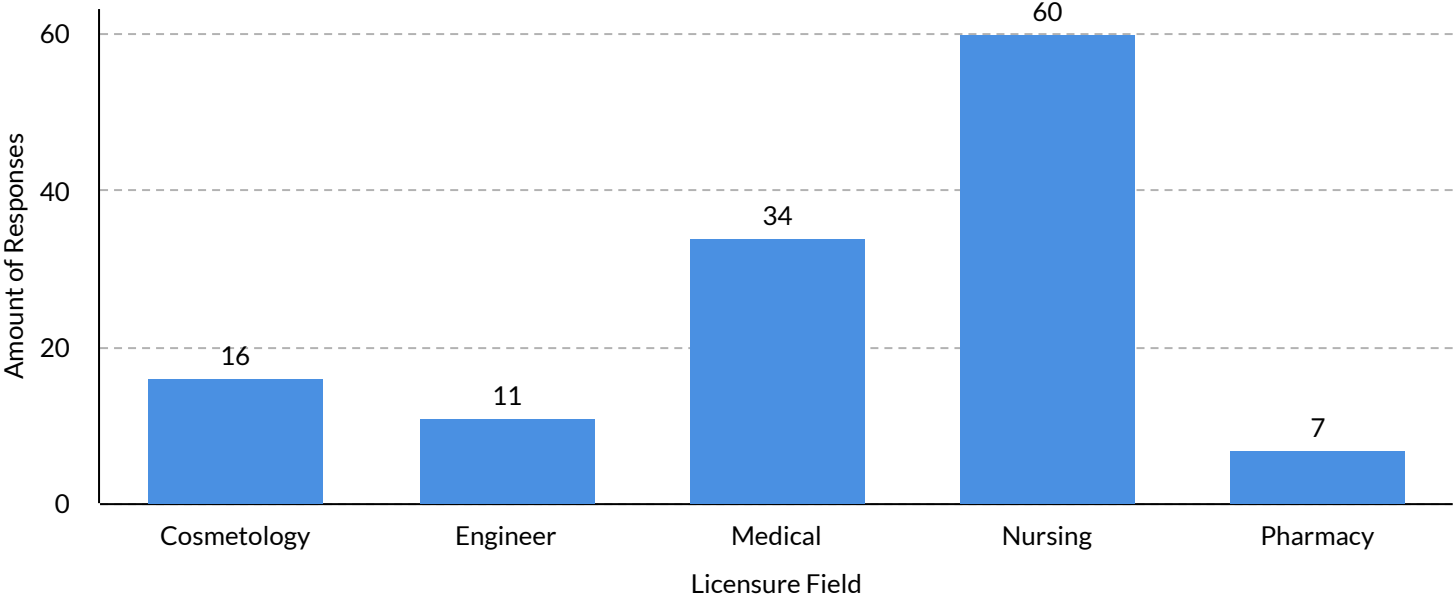
Participants held licenses in 51 different countries before relocating to the United States.

The chart below displays the top 10 countries that licensees held a license in previous to moving to Pennsylvania.



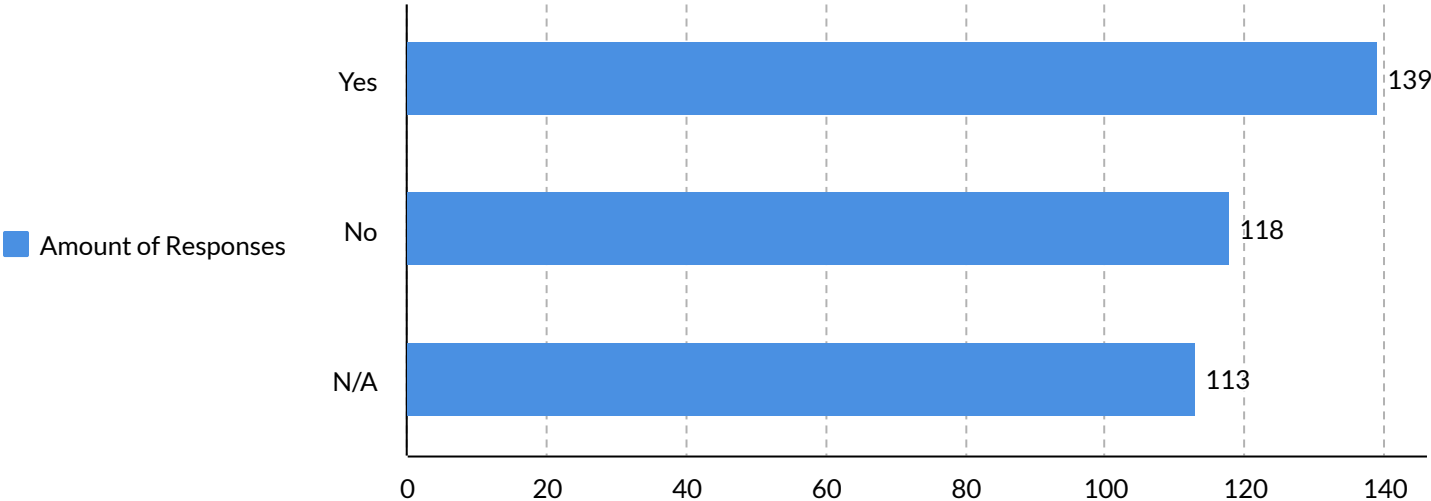
The graph below displays the most popular licensure fields of respondents who indicated that they held an occupational license in another state, territory, or country prior to their move to Pennsylvania.

Medical, Nursing, and Cosmetology professionals were among the larger populations of licensees coming to Pennsylvania from other jurisdictions.



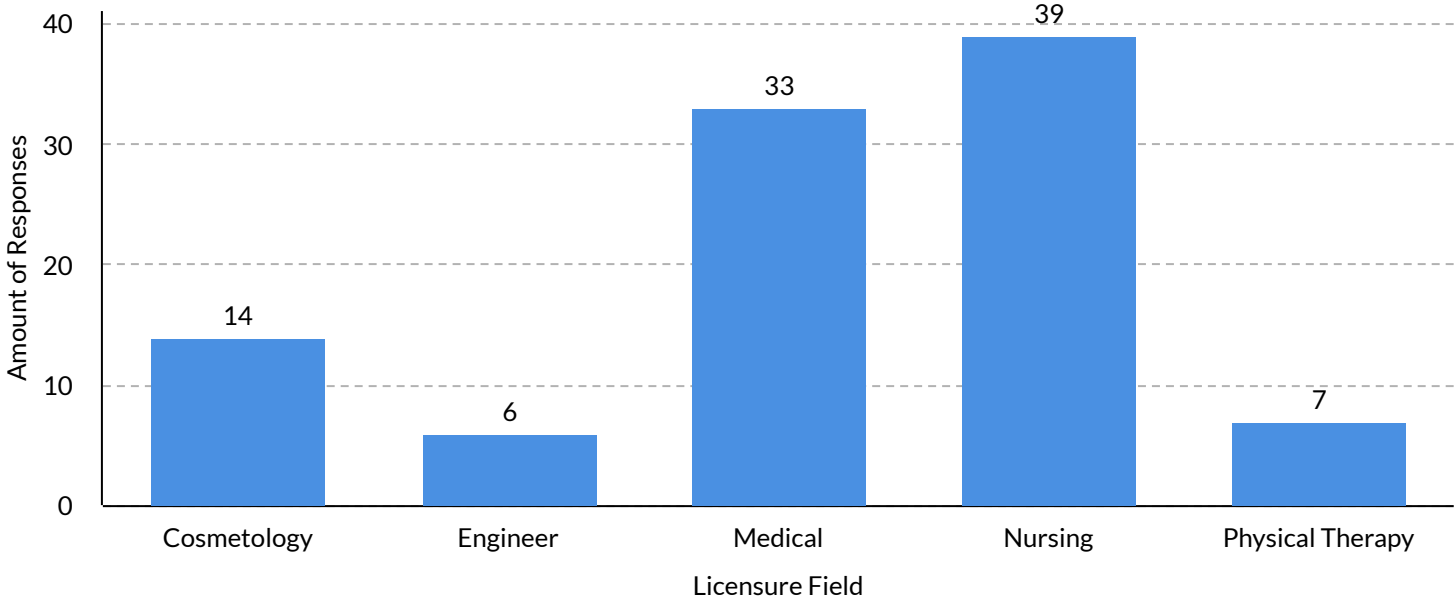
Participants were also asked if they applied for a license in Pennsylvania in the same profession that they were licensed in and practiced outside of the United States. As displayed in the bar graph below, 139 individuals indicated that they indeed did apply for a license in the same profession they practiced outside of the U.S.

### Respondents that applied for a PA license in the same profession they practiced outside of the U.S.



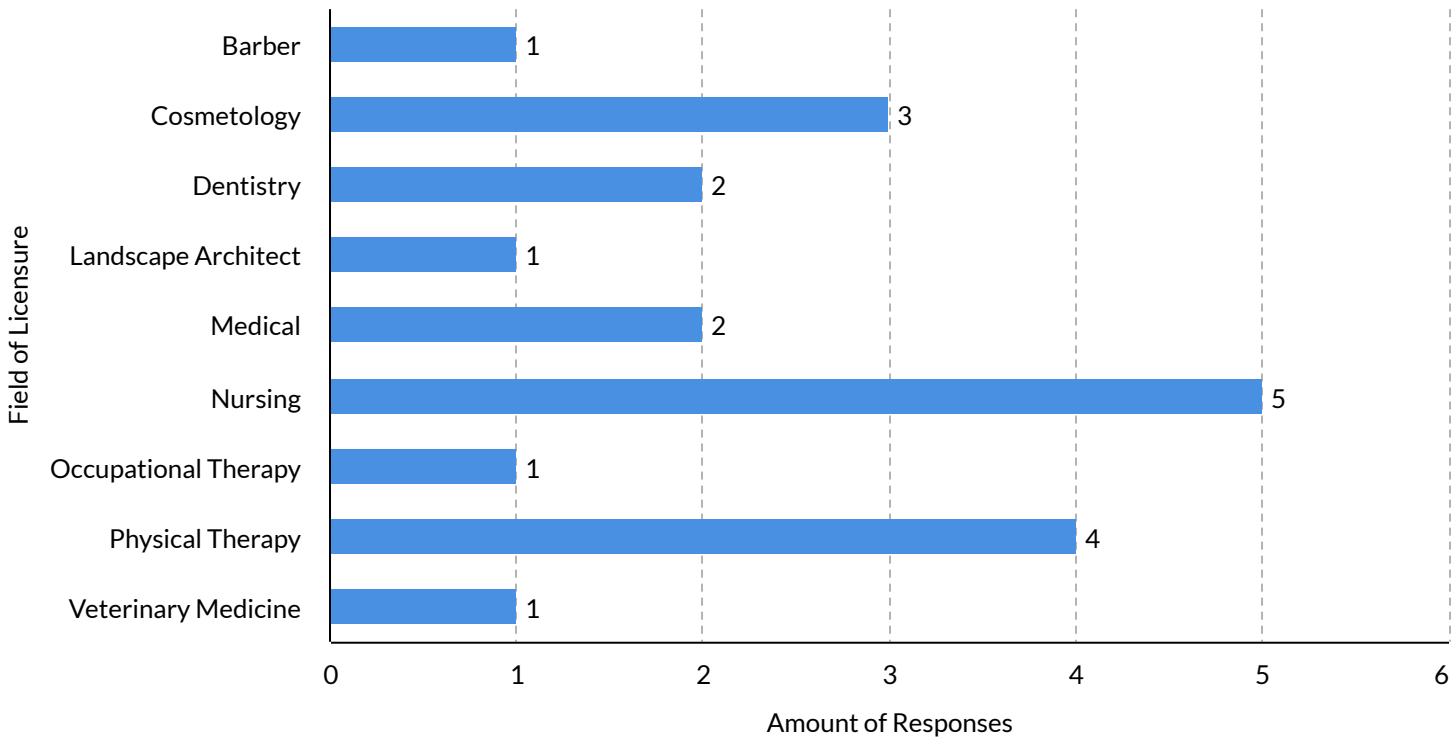
These 139 individuals were then asked which field of license they applied for in both Pennsylvania as well as their country of origin (Outside of the U.S.). The graph below displays the most popular fields among respondents.

Nursing, Medical, and Cosmetology were among the most applied for by this group.



Among the respondents who identified they applied for a license in both Pennsylvania as well as their country of origin, 20 of these individuals were denied an occupational license by Pennsylvania licensing authorities.

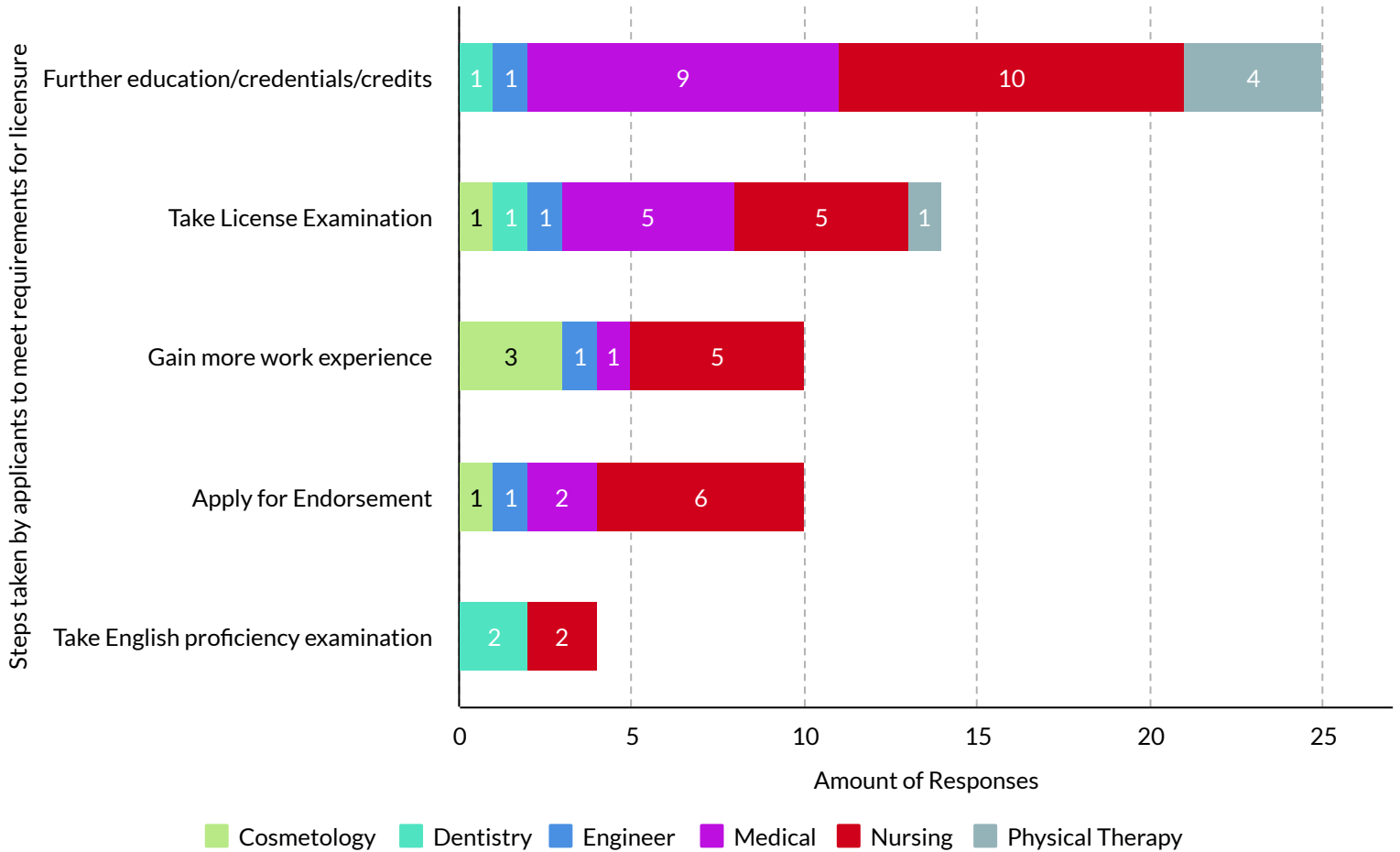
Below is a breakdown of the license classes of those who were denied a license in PA, even after holding a license for the same profession outside of the U.S.



Respondents were then asked what steps they took (if any) to make sure their credentials from another country met requirements for a Pennsylvania occupational license.

As the bar graph below displays, individuals took steps such as furthering their education, taking licensure examinations, and gaining more work experience in order to qualify for Pennsylvania licensing standards.

A correlation may exist between these individuals and the active licensees who spent over \$1,000 in initial licensing expenses (See Page 14, Active Licensee Profile). Licensees who spent over \$1,000 may have spent money on furthering their education before submitting their application for initial occupational licensure.

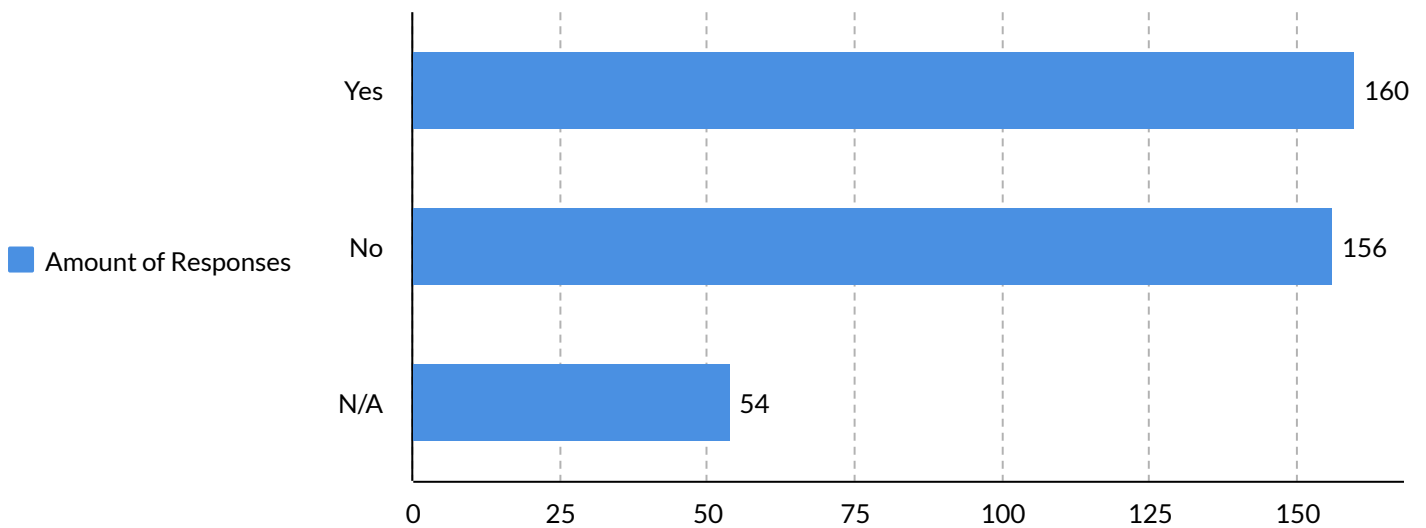


# Additional Requirements for Licensure

Participants from the target group were asked if they had to complete additional education and/or work experience requirements, in the United States, in order to fulfill Pennsylvania occupational licensure standards.

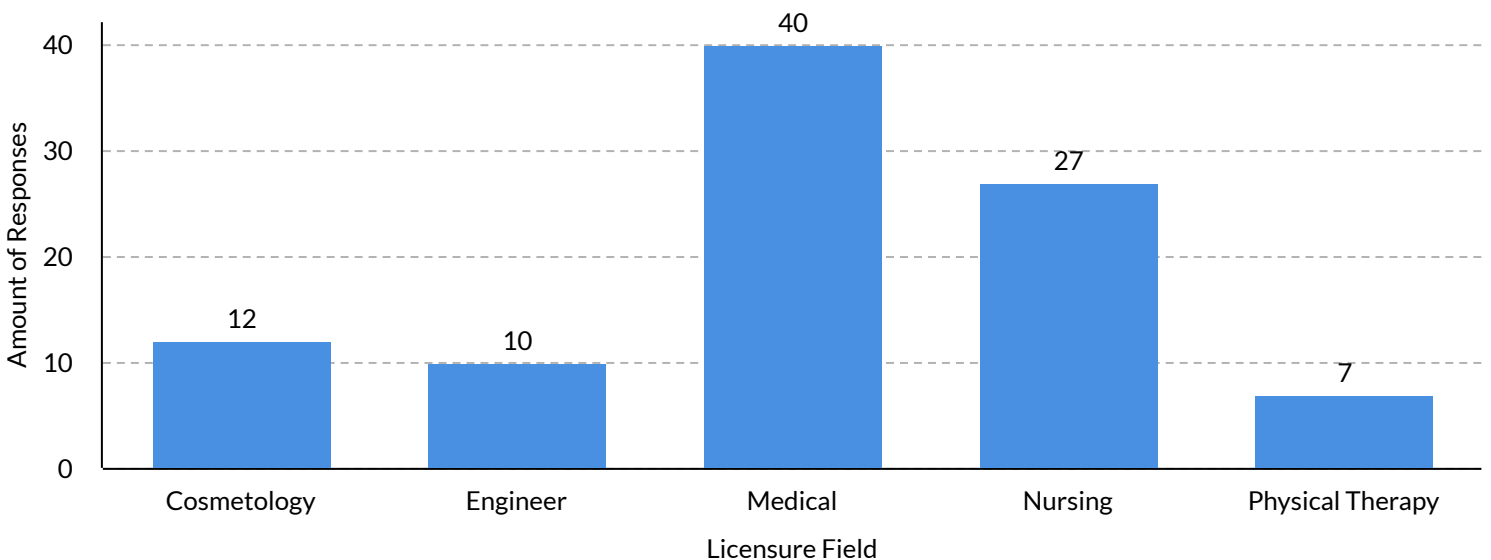
160 respondents reported having to complete additional educational certifications, courses, or degrees in order to comply with Pennsylvania initial licensing requirements.

## Licenses that had to complete additional educational requirements for their PA license



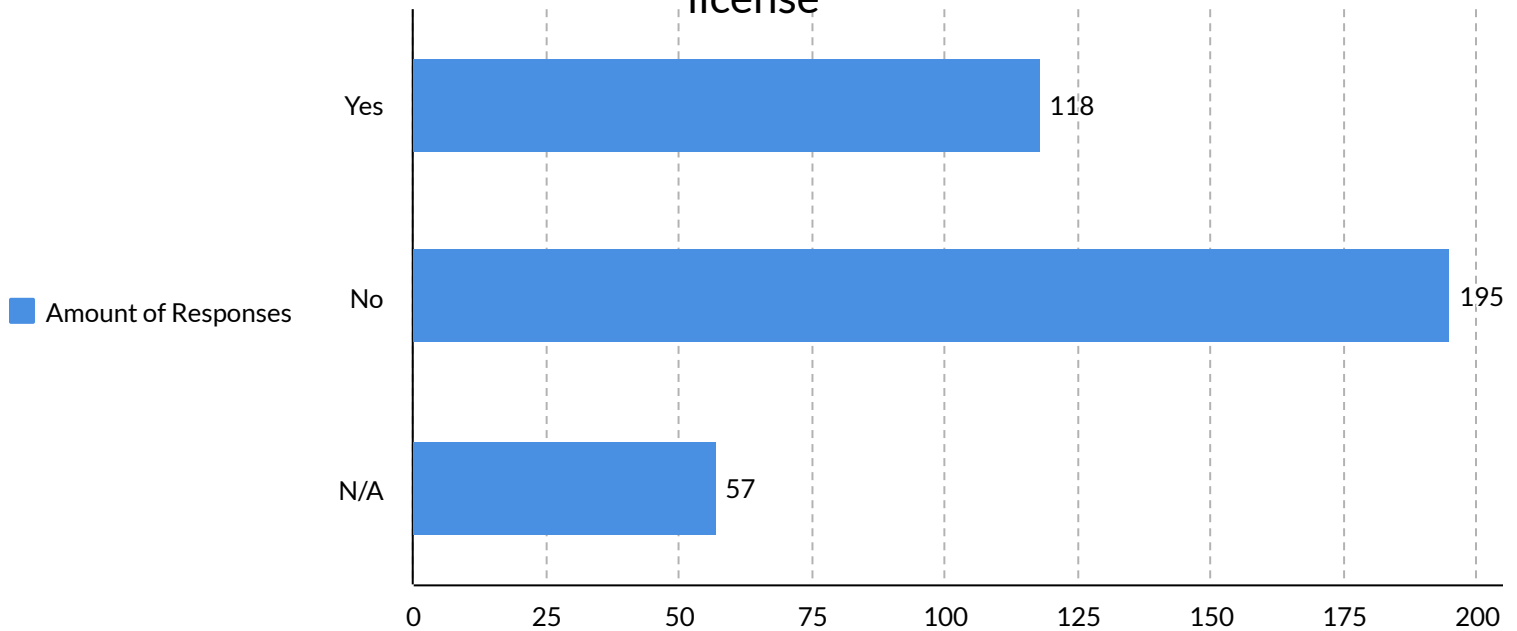
The graph below displays the most popular licensure fields that respondents reported having to complete additional educational requirements for.

Medical, Nursing, and Cosmetology were among the most popular licensure fields.



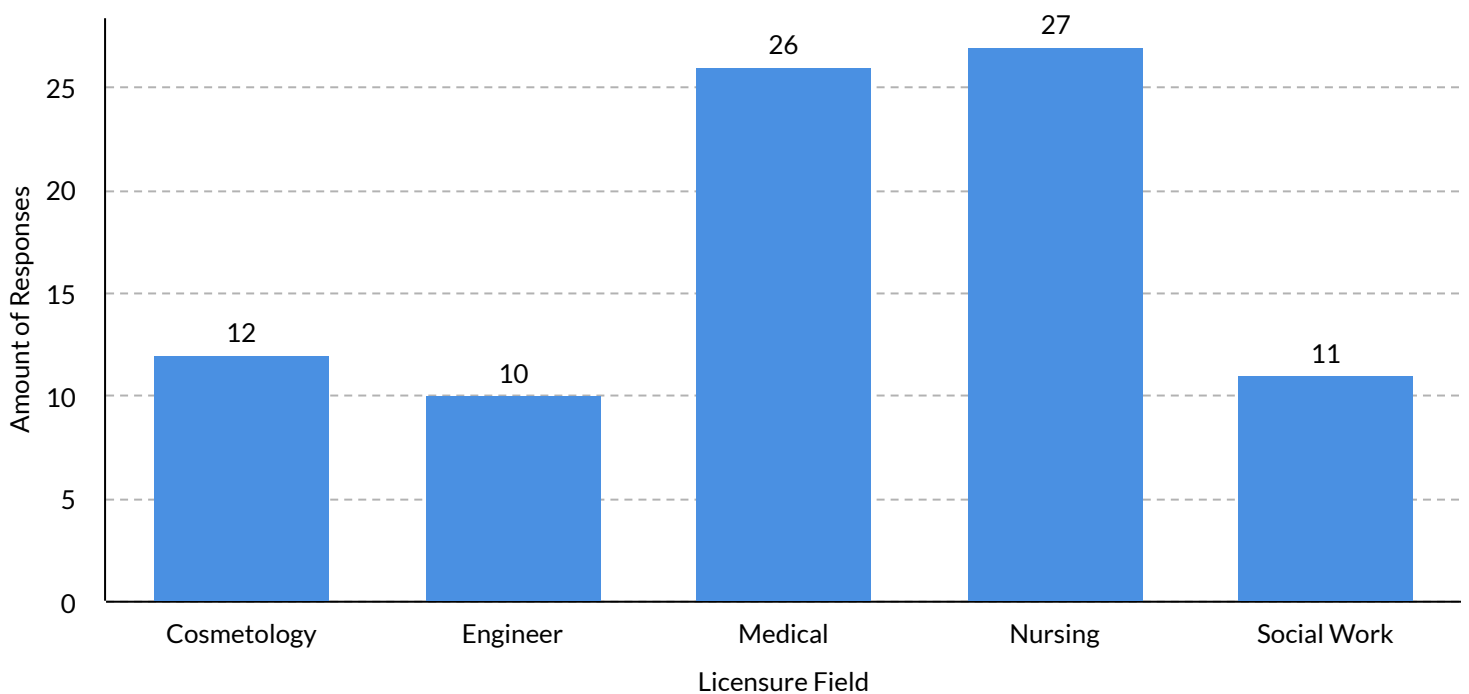
Further, 118 respondents reported having to complete additional work experience requirements in order to comply with Pennsylvania initial licensing requirements.

### Licensees that had to complete additional work requirements for their PA license



The graph below displays the most popular licensure fields that respondents reported having to complete additional educational requirements for.

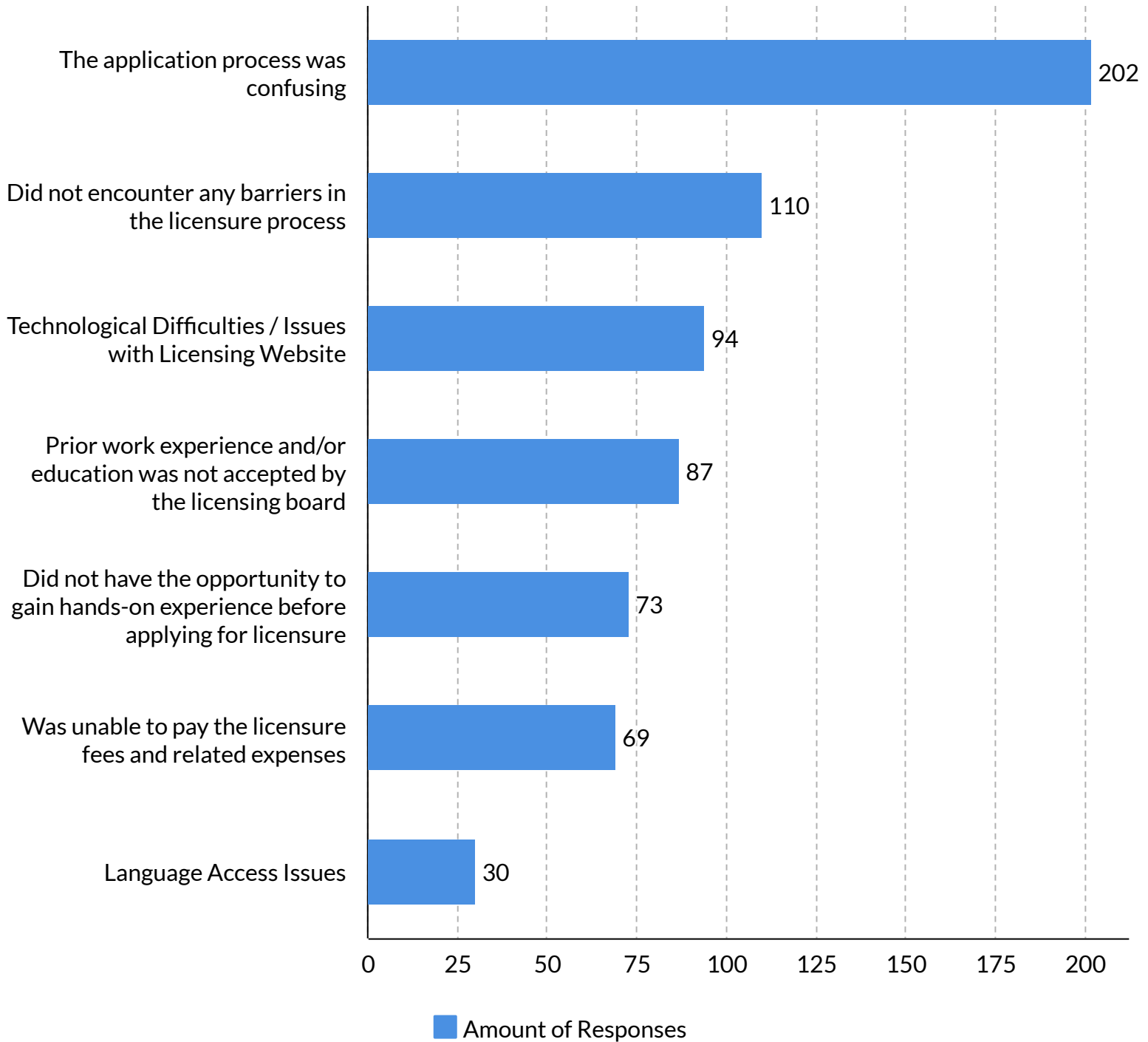
Similar to the educational requirements, Medical, Nursing, and Cosmetology were among the most popular licensure fields.





# Barriers to Licensure

## Barriers encountered when applying for occupational licensure



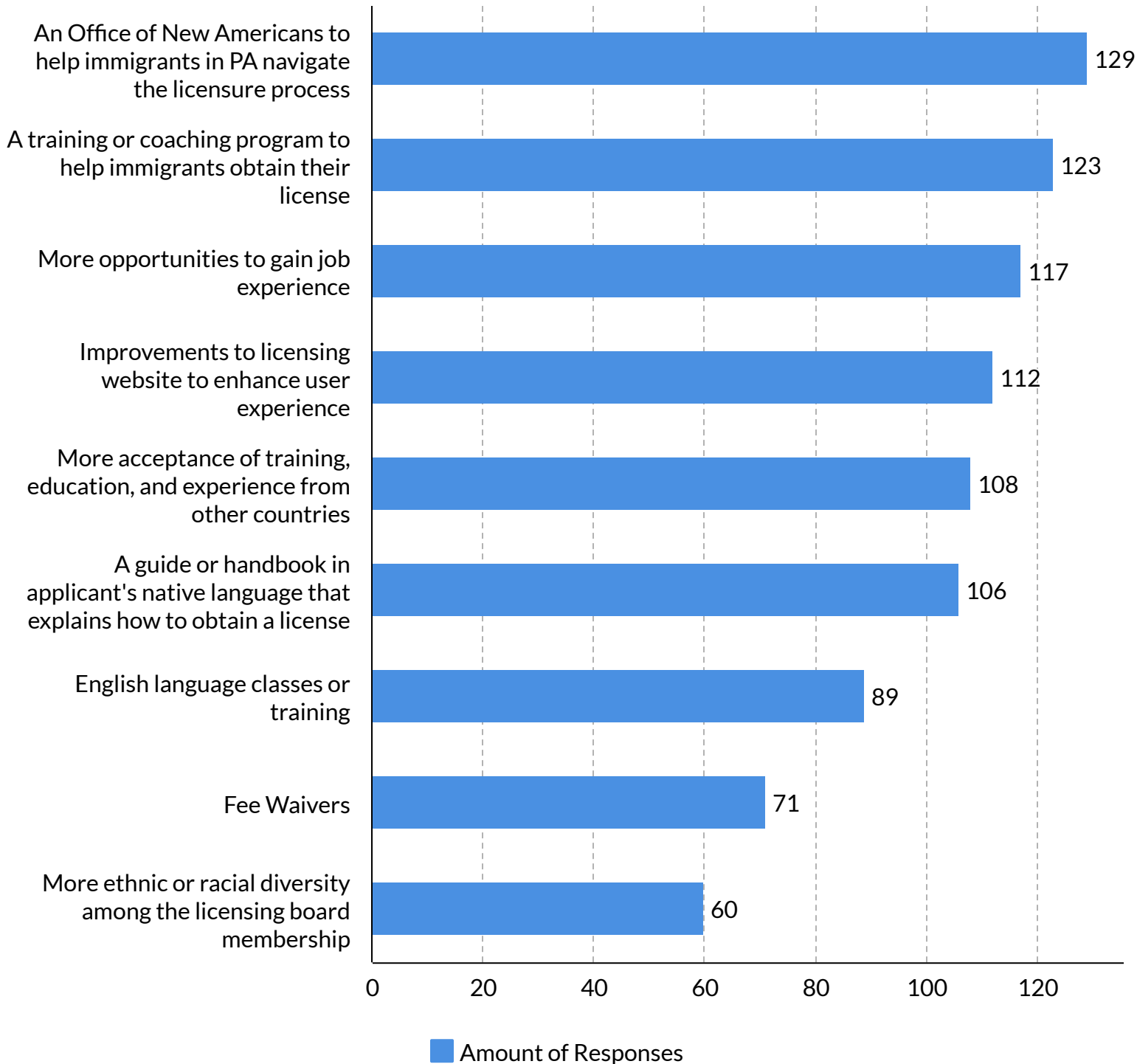
As evidenced by the graph above, the most common barrier to licensure experienced by respondents is that the application process is confusing.

Other respondents reported technological difficulties with the licensing website and prior work experience and education not being accepted by the licensing boards as additional barriers to licensure. However, the second most popular response indicated some respondents did not encounter any barriers when navigating through the licensure process.

Respondents (434 in total) had the option to select more than one response to this question or provide their own response.

# Respondent Recommendations

## Action that would be most beneficial when applying for licensure



When questioned about which actions should be taken by the state to improve the overall licensure process for foreign-born workers, the creation of an Office of New Americans to assist immigrants topped the list.

Other popular responses included: initiating a training or coaching program to help immigrants obtain their license; foster more opportunities to gain hands-on job experience; and make improvements to the licensing application website to enhance the user experience.

Respondents (434 in total) had the option to select more than one response to this question or provide their own response.

In order to gain further understanding of the biggest barriers faced and top recommendations suggested by survey respondents, the data was broken down by each of the seven target groups identified in this study.

As the table below displays, a confusing application process was the biggest barrier for six of the seven groups; however, responses from the different groups varied when it came to their top action that would be most beneficial when applying for licensure.

Target Group	Biggest Barrier	Top Recommendation
Applicants who were denied licensure	The application process was confusing.	A training or coaching program that helps immigrants navigate the license application process.
Applicants who encountered language access barriers	Technological difficulties and issues with licensing website while applying for licensure.	A guide or handbook in native language that explains how to obtain a license.
Individuals who held an occupational license in another jurisdiction before coming to PA	The application process was confusing.	Establish an Office of New Americans that helps immigrants in PA navigate the license application process.
Licensees who hold a PA occupational license	The application process was confusing.	More opportunities to gain job experience in field. (Ex: Apprenticeship or Residency programs)
Licensees who applied for a license in PA for same profession practiced outside of the U.S.	The application process was confusing.	Establish an Office of New Americans that helps immigrants in PA navigate the license application process.
Individuals who had to complete additional educational requirements for their PA license	The application process was confusing.	More acceptance of training, education, and experience from other countries.
Individuals who had to compete additional work requirements for their PA license	The application process was confusing.	More acceptance of training, education, and experience from other countries.

# Comment Section

Before completing the survey, respondents were asked one final open-ended question:

***"How was your experience applying for licensure in Pennsylvania?"***

The open-ended responses were categorized into one of three groupings (Positive, Negative, and Neutral).

Out of the 165 individuals that left comments:

- 44 respondents reported a "Easy/OK" experience overall while applying for a license in Pennsylvania.
- 80 respondents reported a "Complicated/Confusing" experience overall while applying for a license in Pennsylvania.
- 41 respondents left a "Neutral" comment that did not indicate a positive or negative experience while applying for a license in Pennsylvania.

The main theme of the "Positive" comments included having a good experience with zero or minimal issues throughout the license application process.

- **"The experience was what I expected. It was professional, all my questions were answered and I was able to navigate the process with minimal help."**
- **"Very good. I was a new nursing student and had no difficulty obtaining my Pennsylvania license."**

The main themes of the "Negative" comments included issues with the licensing application website, an application process that is very difficult to navigate without support, and a lack of acceptance of foreign credentials and experience.

- **"I found that the website, which lists requirements and process is confusing. It is not straight forward. Information is in different links, spread throughout the website. "**
- **"The website needs to be made entirely more user friendly and provide quick simple links with steps to become licensed."**
- **"It was frustrating, mostly just with the website itself, it is not clear explained how to navigate and when you need to follow up on things it is not clearly explained how to do so. I think the site needs much improvement to be user friendly. "**
- **"Pennsylvania is losing out on many skilled persons being admitted to various professions because of the lack of recognition of the overseas qualifications of new Pennsylvanians. "**

# Major Findings

1. The most commonly found barrier to licensure within the target group is that the application process is confusing and the license application website is not user-friendly, thus leading to frustrated licensees and denied applicants who must start the process over.
2. Applicants denied occupational licensure cited "the use of an incorrect form or unaccepted document when submitting their application" and "foreign education not being accepted as a qualification for licensure" as the main reasons given by the licensing authority for denial of their application.
3. Respondents reported taking such steps as furthering their education and gaining more work experience in order to qualify for Pennsylvania licensing standards.
4. The top language access barrier reported was applicants not being given the option to take their licensing exam in their native language or to have an interpreter assist them.

# Policy Recommendations

1. Establish an Office of New Americans to assist in the creation of a welcoming environment for Pennsylvania's immigrants and refugees by supporting their economic, civic, and social integration including removing barriers to professional licensing. This office would be responsible for carrying out the following measures:
  - Develop a coaching/mentoring program that helps immigrants prepare for the submission of their license application and assist in navigating the licensure process.
  - Create a guide or handbook in the applicant's native language that clearly explains how to obtain a license, with step-by-step instructions and a checklist.
  - Administer programs that allow for more opportunities for immigrants to gain more work experience in their field. (Ex: Apprenticeship or Residency Programs)
  - Coordinate and provide technical assistance and grants to licensure applicants that may need assistance with covering the costs of a translator for a licensing exam and initial licensing fees.
  - Recruit members of the immigrant community to serve as professional and public members for one of Pennsylvania's 29 occupational licensing boards.
  - Promote fundamental pathways to immigrant integration, including ESL classes, citizenship preparation, workforce development, entrepreneurship, language access, community engagement and planning, and laws ensuring fair and equal treatment.
  - Champion the rights of immigrants and act as an advocate for local, state and federal policies that support immigrant and refugee communities and create a welcoming state.
2. Improve the license application website in order to enhance user-experience and address the uncertainty that exists within the application process.
3. Promote further recognition of training, education, and experience from other countries.
4. Ask the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services for a waiver of Social Security Number requirements on licensure applications.

# Policy Recommendations

The results and findings presented earlier in the report led to development of the policy recommendations featured below:

## #1 - Establish an Office for New Americans to assist immigrants navigate the license application process and provide support in other key areas of professional development

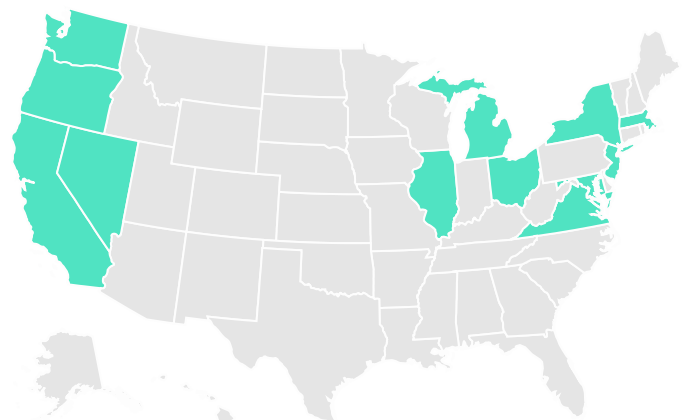
Numerous states across the country have created an Office for New Americans (ONA) to advance the economic and communal integration of immigrant, refugee, and asylee residents. An ONA serves as an advocate for new populations and connects these individuals to resources and programs that aim to reduce social, economic, and health disparities. These offices and their administrators ensure that policy decisions and programs are consistent with the needs of New Americans and also monitor statewide immigrant integration initiatives.

Based off the responses from this study, an ONA would be beneficial in the following areas to address barriers to occupational licensure and ease the burden most immigrants face when re-locating to the United States:

- Develop a coaching/mentoring program that helps immigrants prepare for the submission of their license application and assist in navigating the licensure process.
- Create a guide or handbook in the applicant's native language that clearly explains how to obtain a license, with step-by-step instructions and a checklist.
- Administer programs that allow for more opportunities for immigrants to gain more work experience in their field. (Ex: Apprenticeship or Residency Programs)
- Coordinate and provide technical assistance and grants to licensure applicants that may need assistance with covering the costs of a translator for a licensing exam and initial licensing fees.
- Recruit members of the immigrant community to serve as professional and public members for one of Pennsylvania's 29 occupational licensing boards.
- Promote fundamental pathways to immigrant integration, including ESL classes, citizenship preparation, workforce development, entrepreneurship, language access, community engagement and planning, and laws ensuring fair and equal treatment
- Champion the rights of immigrants and act as an advocate for local, state and federal policies that support immigrant and refugee communities and create a welcoming state.

Currently, 12 states have established an ONA:

California	New Jersey
Illinois	New York
Maryland	Ohio
Massachusetts	Oregon
Michigan	Virginia
Nevada	Washington



# Policy Recommendations

State officials have primarily pursued one of two strategies to establish an ONA: pass legislation or sign an executive order. The following provides examples of states establishing an ONA through each strategy.

## **Legislation (Maryland & Virginia):**

In 2021, the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs was created through legislation [SB 85] with a host of responsibilities which include establishing a network of neighborhood-based opportunity centers, increasing access to programs that teach the English language, and connecting immigrants with job training and employment referral services.<sup>11</sup>

The Virginia ONA was established through legislation [HB 1209] approved by Governor Ralph Northam (D) in April 2020. HB 1209 "establishes the Office of New Americans within the Department of Social Services and the Office of New Americans Advisory Board to assist with immigrant integration within the Commonwealth on an economic, social, linguistic, and cultural level."<sup>12</sup>

## **Executive Orders (New Jersey & Ohio):**

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy (D) signed Executive Order 74 in 2019, which directed the Department of Human Services and the Department of Labor & Workforce Development to form an ONA. According to the order, the ONAs mission is to support immigrants and refugees in New Jersey through outreach, education, and legal services. The order also established an interagency workgroup, co-chaired by the Departments of Human Services and Labor & Workforce Development, which provides advice and recommendations on strategies and actions to ensure new Americans are welcomed into all aspects of the state's communities and economy.<sup>13</sup>

Ohio's "Office for Opportunities for New Americans" was created by former Governor John Kasich's (R) administration via Executive Order 2018-05K in May 2018. The executive order focused on immigrants' economic integration by targeting three pillars: education, employment and entrepreneurship. In addition to creating the office, the EO also created a New Americans Advisory Committee (NAAC) consisting of 12 members appointed by the governor to serve three-year terms.<sup>14</sup>

[11] <https://goci.maryland.gov/2021/10/01/governors-office-of-community-initiatives-announces-new-office-of-immigrant-affairs/>

[12] <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+CHAP1078+pdf>

[13] <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-74.pdf>

[14] <https://www.afsc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Governor%20Kasich%20EO%20NewAmericans2018.pdf>



# Policy Recommendations

States design and staff their ONAs differently based on the office's focus areas, including refugee services, legal services, workforce development programs, and other program areas. Further, budgetary support for ONAs vary widely among the states, ranging from as high as \$30 million to as low as \$200,000 in fiscal year 2021. Budgetary sources typically include: General Fund, Federal funding for Refugee Services, state workforce development agencies, among others.

When forming their ONA, states tend to follow one of three general models with regard to their structure:

## **Stand-alone agencies or offices (Massachusetts and Nevada):**

- The **Massachusetts** Office for Refugees & Immigrants was created through executive order in 1985 and its director sits on the Governor's Advisory Council on Refugees and Immigrants, a body created to provide the Governor's Office with input on policy and planning surrounding refugees and immigrants entering the Commonwealth.
- Both **Maryland and Nevada's** ONA exist as distinct divisions within their respective Governor's Office and is led by a Director appointed by the Governor.<sup>15</sup>

## **Agencies or Units within an Existing Department (Michigan, New York and Virginia):**

- **Michigan's** ONA is housed under the state's Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity and has ten staff members and an Executive Director appointed by the Governor.<sup>16</sup>
- **New York's** ONA is managed within the Department of State and is staffed by the ONA Director (Appointed by the Secretary of State), Deputy Director, several program analysts, and 20 legal counsels that provide free legal service for immigrants.
- **Virginia's** Department of Social Services oversees its ONA. The office's staff is comprised of an Executive Director who works in tandem with a Senior Policy Advisor based in the Governor's Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office to implement the Commonwealth's immigrant integration strategy.

## **Lead Policy staff within the Governor's Office (California and Washington):**

- **California** and **Washington** both have a lead Policy Advisor, appointed by their respective Governors to serve in their cabinet, that ensures state policies and programs are implemented in a manner inclusive to the state's immigrant population.

[15] <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/indy-qa-office-for-new-americans-director-on-the-new-state-agency-and-her-career-focused-on-refugees>

[16] <https://www.michigan.gov/ogm/>

# Policy Recommendations

## #2 - Improve the license application website in order to enhance user-experience and address the uncertainty that exists within the application process

Results from the survey data make it clear that there are problems within the overall license application process. Over 30% of respondents identified a "confusing application process" as their biggest barrier to licensure; which coincidentally, was the most frequently reported barrier among all survey respondents. In fact, of the seven target groups studied (*see page 23 for more information on target groups*) six cited difficulties when navigating the application process for license. The procedure and operation of obtaining an occupational license is overseen by the Department of State within its Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs, and as the sole administrator of this process, it is imperative that the Department recognizes the deficiencies within the process and work to address bottlenecks within the system.

Currently, if an individual would like to submit an application for an occupational license or apply for a license renewal, they must use the Pennsylvania Licensing System (PALS). PALS is the Department's system of record to support data collection, interdepartmental information exchange, and workflows related to professional licensure.

According to comments collected throughout the survey, respondents expressed frustration with PALS and the application process. A common thread among comments include the desire for a more "user-friendly" PALS site and a clearer explanation of what is required of an individual when submitting an application for licensure. As highlighted in the Comment Section overview on Page 24, the negative comments almost doubled the amount of positive comments submitted by respondents when asked about their experience applying for a license.

Comments focused on a lack of organization when listing requirements to apply for licensure and that it is very difficult to advance through the PALS website, with users noting that the information is scattered throughout the site and involves clicking on many different links to find what they are looking for. Respondents also encountered glitches when using the site, leading users to being kicked out of the system while in the middle of uploading documentation and being forced to start the process all over, which is time-consuming, inconvenient, and costly for the public.

Users also have a difficult time maneuvering through the site on their own, often having to reach out to BPOA board staff, professional associations, academic career services and other workforce development groups in order to understand how to successfully submit their application. This is a major drain on the resources of BPOA staff as well as our partner organizations.

The process to obtain a license should not be this difficult and it is recommended that the PALS system undergo a series of upgrades to fix the problems or replace the PALS system with another that has the ability to address these customer service issues.

# Policy Recommendations

The following table includes suggestions to make PALS more user-friendly as well as ideas to reduce the level of confusion surrounding the application process.

Problem	Recommendation
1. User issues with PALS website, including but not limited to: glitches when uploading documents, problems accessing their application information, and having to re-submit their application when the system crashes.	Revamp PALS website to address bugs and glitches in the system or replace it with another system that can handle the workload and process licenses efficiently.
2. Lack of available customer service options for applicants who get stuck when using PALS, leaving them stranded with no options, as well as long wait times to hear back from board staff when applicants are finally able to make contact.	Increase help desk staffing levels (including bilingual staff) to address customer service issues and add a "live-chat" function to the website for applicants who may have quick questions and need support.
3. Users confused as to the status of their application after submitting it through the PALS system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement an application progress "tracker" that gives users the ability to view live status updates as their application moves through the proper channels.</li> <li>- Additionally, include updates that notify users when the board has received documentation from applicants.</li> </ul>
4. Users report a complicated process to apply online and information is difficult to find and scattered throughout PALS website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-design website to become more uniform and straightforward when listing required documentation and the steps that need to be completed when submitting an application.</li> <li>- Provide quick, simple links with application requirements, detailed online tutorials with screenshots/videos, and other useful information that users can refer to.</li> <li>- The design and interface for these tools should be tested with internal and external users in order to collect user data and implement feedback.</li> <li>- Create a frequently asked questions (FAQ) forum to provide information on common questions or concerns that tend to recur, as a useful means of organizing information and curb common knowledge gaps.</li> </ul>
5. Users who are not native-English speakers have trouble accessing the website.	Create step-by-step guides, in other popular languages, that are easily understood and can assist non-English speaking users as they progress through the license application.

# Policy Recommendations

## #3 - Promote further recognition of training, education, and experience from other countries

State licensing agencies set the eligibility standards that are accepted to fulfill regulatory and statutory requirements for occupational licensure. These requirements, determined by the state legislature and enforced through professional licensing authorities, aim to advance public health and safety goals. Licensure requirements typically include a combination of education, examination(s), training or work experience, among other prerequisites.

While essential to protecting consumers, state administrative rules and processes within civilian licensing and credentialing systems can create unnecessary burdens for foreign-trained applicants attempting to obtain licensure or certification; and these impediments are often unrelated to their ability to competently provide professional services to the public. Applicants frequently find it difficult to attain formal recognition of their foreign training, experiences, and skill sets through professional licensure standards. Challenges faced in the license application process not only obstruct the potential for immigrants' success in the job market, but also disservice the labor market as nearly 2 million highly skilled immigrants across the country are underemployed or working in low-skilled jobs instead of in the field they trained for built their career in. This "brain waste" results in \$40 billion in foregone wages annually and \$10 billion in lost federal, state, and local tax payments.<sup>17</sup>

Many immigrants arrive to the United States having already completed extensive education, job training, and/or work experience internationally. For example, In 2016, 17.2% of immigrants ages 25 and older had a bachelor's degree and another 12.8% had attained a postgraduate degree, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.<sup>18</sup> However, research from the Brookings Institute indicates most highly-skilled immigrants are overqualified for their current positions and have an onerous time finding employment that utilizes their advanced skillset.<sup>19</sup>

Respondents to the *New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey* reported encountering obstacles when attempting to fulfill state licensure requirements. More specifically, the lack of recognition of foreign education and training proved especially difficult for many immigrants to overcome when navigating the licensure application process. Foreign-trained immigrants often have transcripts and advanced degrees that are not recognized or translated properly in the United States, due to grading systems that are exceedingly different and may be misinterpreted when reviewed by a state licensing agency.

This conundrum pushes immigrants to face an unenviable dilemma: their foreign-acquired work experience is not credited towards the requirements necessary to obtain a license, yet they are unable to gain U.S. work experience without the issuance of an occupational license. This often leads to immigrants having to start over by re-taking coursework in an American educational institution, which can be costly, frustrating, and repetitive, in order to qualify for entry-level positions in a field that they may have been considered an expert in their country of origin.

[17]<https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/barriers-to-work-immigrants-with-work-authorization.aspx>

[18][https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/licensing\\_report\\_final\\_nonembargo.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/licensing_report_final_nonembargo.pdf)

[19][http://www.hartfordinfo.org/Issues/wsd/Immigrants/geography\\_Immigrant\\_skills.pdf](http://www.hartfordinfo.org/Issues/wsd/Immigrants/geography_Immigrant_skills.pdf)

# Policy Recommendations

Nevertheless, there are options for foreign professionals seeking to obtain their Pennsylvania occupational license. Foreign professionals who are already licensed to practice an occupation in another country have the opportunity to become licensed in Pennsylvania due to the signing of Act 41 of 2019, which allows for portability of out-of-state professional licensees coming to work in Pennsylvania. Act 41 does this by granting all boards and commissions within the Commonwealth the authority to endorse licensees from other states, territories or jurisdictions (with substantially equivalent licensing requirements) who are active, in good standing and without discipline against their license or criminal conviction. Additionally, most Pennsylvania occupational licensing boards (20 out of 29 boards) have language in their regulations to accept foreign education and training as long as it is substantially equivalent to the type of instruction they would receive in the United States. For the 9 boards that do not have this language included in their regulations,<sup>20</sup> it may be due to the board not having any education or training requirements for licensure (such as the Vehicle Board) or there may not be a foreign equivalency to the instruction received in the US, and thus it may not apply to those professions.

While it's established that state licensing boards already have provisions in place to accept licensees from foreign jurisdictions, such as Act 41 of 2019, and most boards have regulations that allow for the acceptance of foreign education and training, the survey data clearly demonstrates that a discrepancy exists as 13% of respondents indicate difficulty in having their foreign education and experience accepted by state licensing boards. It is therefore recommended that BPOA, and the licensing boards it oversees, conduct a review of the existing regulations and processes related to reviewing a foreign applicant's education and experience, to ensure there are no bottlenecks in the process that can hinder an applicant from obtaining a license. Further, for licensing boards that do not have language in their regulations to accept foreign education, it is recommended they perform an internal review of their regulations and compare them to those of other states to confirm whether more can be done to accept foreign education and perhaps set standards for equivalency.

Finally, there are a couple of legislative approaches which states have enacted over the past few years that Pennsylvania could entertain in order to address this barrier to licensure. For example:

<sup>21</sup>  
Maine HP 105 (2021) - Allows the Director of the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation to exercise discretionary authority, after consultation with licensing entities, to waive documentation requirements for licensure submitted by applicants educated in or with relevant experience or licensure in other jurisdictions, including other states, United States territories, foreign nations and foreign administrative divisions, as long as the waiver does not reduce the requisite standards of proficiency for the licensed profession or occupation. It allows the director to waive examination fees and license fees for applicants for licensure educated in or with relevant experience or licensure in other jurisdictions.

<sup>22</sup>  
Utah SB 131 (2015) - Offers an occupational therapist license to an applicant who passes the state licensing exam, and was licensed in a foreign country where the education, experience or exam requirements are not substantially equal to Utah's requirements.

[20] State Board of Auctioneer Examiners, State Board of Barber Examiners, State Board of Chiropractic, State Board of Funeral Directors, The Navigation Commission for the Delaware River and Its Navigable Tributaries, State Board of Osteopathic Medicine, State Board of Podiatry, State Real Estate Commission, State Vehicle Board

[21]<https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0105&item=1&num=130>

[22]<https://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SB0131.html>

# Policy Recommendations

## #4 - Ask the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services for a waiver of Social Security Number requirements on licensure applications

When applying for or renewing an occupational license, individuals are required to submit their social security number (SSN) to the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs. Disclosure of the SSN is mandatory in order to comply with federal statutes.<sup>23</sup> This policy presents an unfair restriction to undocumented persons who do not have a SSN and it prevents them from experiencing economic mobility.

In an attempt to rectify the situation, state officials,<sup>24</sup> pursuant to Pennsylvania's SSN Privacy Act,<sup>25</sup> asked the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) for a waiver from requiring applicants to submit a SSN, and to instead use a driver's license or non-driver ID number. The request was denied by HHS; however, that request was made in 2008 and with a different administration in office, perhaps a new consideration will be given to this waiver request. Attitudes surrounding undocumented immigrants have evolved since the time the prior request was made. Considering the void of medical professionals that was exposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; this waiver, which will lead to an increase in the pool of applicants to become licensed professionals, may be approved this time around.

There may be a legislative solution to this issue as well. For example, California passed SB 1159<sup>26</sup> in 2014, which allows eligible individuals to apply for professional licenses, regardless of their immigration status. The law requires licensing bodies to allow applicants to provide either an individual tax identification number (ITIN) or a SSN. Nevada passed similar legislation with the signing of AB 275<sup>27</sup> in 2019.

Also, while not as urgent of an issue but something that should be considered along with this recommendation, a few licensed professions have U.S. citizenship requirements for licensure included in their respective practice acts (For example: Nursing and Pharmacy).<sup>28</sup> However, it should be noted that various Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General opinions have determined these requirements to be unconstitutional, and as a result, BPOA has not enforced them in decades.<sup>30</sup>

With that being said, it does not make much sense to continue having these statutory citizenship requirements exist in the board's practice acts and it is recommended that legislators go through the process of removing any citizenship requirements that may still remain.

Looking again to California, state lawmakers passed legislation in 2018 with similar intent in the form of SB 695,<sup>31</sup> which explicitly prohibits licensing boards from requiring that applicants disclose their citizenship and immigration status and prohibits boards from denying applications based on these factors.

[23] Requirements of the Federal Social Security Act pertaining to Child Support Enforcement

[24] Under section 6 of PA's Social Security Number Privacy Act (act of November 29, 2006, P.L. 1456, No. 160) (71 P.S. § 2606), "[t]he Department of Public Welfare (now Human Services) shall apply for an exemption under section 666(d) of the Social Security Act.

[25] <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/US/PDF/2006/0/0160..PDF>

[26] Bill Text - SB-1159 Professions and vocations: license applicants: individual tax identification number.

[27] <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019/Bill/6498/Text>

[28] Section 5 of the Practical Nurse Law (63 P.S. § 655)

[29] Section 3(a)(1) of the Pharmacy Act (63 P.S. § 390-3(a)(1))

[30] OFFICIAL OPINION No. 114 - 1972 Pa. AG LEXIS 20; 1972 Op. Atty Gen. Pa. 40 - March 23, 1972

[31] Bill Text: CA SB695 | 2017-2018 | Regular Session | Chaptered | LegiScan



## Conclusion

The *New Pennsylvanians Licensure Study* identified administrative and regulatory barriers that foreign-born individuals face when attempting to obtain a professional license, such as a cumbersome application process, issues using the license application website, difficulty translating their foreign education and experience into requirements for state licensure, language access issues, and a lack of support staff to turn to when a roadblock is encountered.

Pennsylvania officials must acknowledge these problems and implement strategies to correct the administrative processes and regulations that serve as a barrier to foreign-born individuals.

Examples of such strategies include the creation of an Office of New Americans, upgrades to the license application website to make the process more user-friendly, and further recognition of foreign education and training.

Reducing barriers to licensure for New Pennsylvanians will open up more opportunities for these individuals and simultaneously bolster economic conditions by increasing the pool of qualified professionals practicing in the Commonwealth.

## Resources

For questions or more information on occupational licensing in Pennsylvania, and to find a full listing of all 29 boards and commissions housed under BPOA, please visit the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs website:

<https://www.dos.pa.gov/ProfessionalLicensing/Pages/default.aspx>

For other general updates related to the Department of State, please visit:

<https://www.dos.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

For questions or comments concerning this study, please contact Andrew LaFratte, Department of State - Executive Policy Specialist ([alafratte@pa.gov](mailto:alafratte@pa.gov)).

# Appendix A - Survey Questions

## Occupational Licensing & Employment

### **1. Have you ever applied for an occupational license in Pennsylvania?**

- Yes
- No

### **2. If so, was your application denied?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

### **3. If you answered YES to Question 2, what was the reason given for the denial?**

- Fill-In: (500 words)

### **4. If you answered YES to Question 2: After you submitted your application, how long did it take for your application to be denied?**

- Under 1 month
- 1 to 2 months
- 2 to 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- 9 months to 1 year
- N/A

### **5. If you were denied licensure; Please select the field you applied for:**

- Accountancy
- Architects
- Barber
- Chiropractic
- Cosmetology
- Dentistry
- Engineer, Land Surveyor, or Geologist
- Massage Therapy
- Medical (Physician, Surgeon, Physician Assistant, Radiology Technician, Respiratory Therapist, etc.)
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Optometry
- Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Podiatry
- Psychology
- Real Estate
- Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapists
- Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists
- Vehicle Manufacturers, Dealers & Salespersons
- Veterinary Medicine
- Other (Please Specify):



**6. Did you encounter any language barriers while you were trying to get your professional license?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**7. If you answered YES to Question 6, which type of language barriers did you encounter? [Select all that apply]**

- I was not given the option to take licensing exam in my native language or have an interpreter help me
- I did not understand the licensing requirements
- There were problems with the translation or interpretation services provided by the licensing authority
- Other (Please Specify – 250 words): \_\_\_\_\_
- N/A

**8. Were you required to take an English proficiency test as a requirement for your license?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**9. If you answered YES to Question 8, did you pass the English proficiency examination?**

- Yes
- No

**10. Do you hold an occupational license in Pennsylvania?**

- Yes
- No
- Yes, but it has expired
- N/A

**11. If you answered YES to Question 9, please select the field that best describes your license:**

- Accountancy
- Architects
- Barber
- Chiropractic
- Cosmetology
- Dentistry
- Engineer, Land Surveyor, or Geologist
- Massage Therapy
- Medical (Physician, Surgeon, Physician Assistant, Radiology Technician, Respiratory Therapist, etc.)
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Optometry
- Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Podiatry
- Psychology
- Real Estate
- Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapists
- Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists
- Vehicle Manufacturers, Dealers & Salespersons
- Veterinary Medicine
- Other (Please Specify):

**12. If you answered YES to Question 9, how long did it take for you to receive your occupational license after you submitted your application?**

- Under 1 month
- 1 to 2 months
- 2 to 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- 9 months to 1 year

**13. If you answered YES to Question 9, about how much did it cost for you to get your license? [Please include the costs for licensing fees, exam fees, language training courses, any training certification courses you took that were required for licensure or other money you spent to get your license.]**

- \$0 to \$200
- \$201 to \$400
- \$401 to \$700
- \$701 to \$1,000
- \$1,001 to \$1,500
- \$1,501 - \$2,000
- \$Over \$2,000
- N/A

**14. Did you hold an occupational license before you came to Pennsylvania?**

- Yes
- No

**15. If you answered YES to Question 13, please list all the states, territories, or countries where you previously had a license in:**

- Fill-In: (100 words)

**16. If you answered YES to Question #9 and/or #13, Did you need to complete additional work experience to fulfill Pennsylvania licensing requirements (For example: clinical experience)?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**17. If you answered YES to Question #9 and/or #13, Did you have to complete additional education in the US in order to fulfill Pennsylvania licensing requirements (For example: completion of training course, completion of degree)?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**18. Did you apply for a license in the U.S. in the same profession you practiced outside the U.S.?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**19. If answered YES to Question 17, please describe any steps you took to make sure your credentials from another country met the requirements for occupational licensure in the U.S.:**

- Comments (500 words)

## Barriers & Recommendations

### **20. What barriers did you encounter while obtaining a license? [Select all that apply]**

- The application process was confusing
- My prior work experience and/or education was not accepted by the licensing board. (For example: I did not have enough clinical experience in the US)
- I did not have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience before applying for licensure
- I was not able to pay the licensure fees and related expenses
- I faced technological difficulties while applying for licensure (Example: Issues with licensing website)
- Language Access Issues
- Other (Please Specify):
- I did not encounter any barriers while obtaining licensure

### **21. Would any of the items on the list below help you get your occupational license? [Select all that apply]**

- A guide or handbook in my native language(s) that explains how to get a license
- English language classes or training
- An office of New Americans that helps immigrants in Pennsylvania navigate the process for getting a license
- Fee waivers (Not having to pay certain fees)
- More ethnic or racial diversity among the licensing board membership
- More acceptance of training, education, and experience in other countries
- A training or coaching program that helps immigrants navigate the licensing process
- More opportunities to gain job experience in my field, for example through apprenticeship or residency programs
- Improvements to licensing website to enhance user experience
- Other (Please Specify):

### **22. In general, how was your experience applying for an occupational license in Pennsylvania:**

- Comments (500 Words)

### **23. Feel free to provide any additional comments:**

- Comments (500 Words)

## Language

### **24. In which languages are you proficient? [Select all that apply]**

- English
- Spanish
- Arabic
- Mandarin
- Chinese
- Korean
- Tagalog
- Hindi
- French
- Malayalam
- Russian
- Portuguese
- Vietnamese
- Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**25. What is your English language level?**

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced
- Proficient Speaker

Education

**26. What is the highest degree or level of school you completed outside of the United States?**

- Some high school / secondary school
- High school graduate / GED
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade, technical or vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Professional Degree (Ex: M.D., D.O., PharmD., D.M.D.)
- Doctorate (Ph.D.)

**27. What was your field of study outside of the United States?**

- Business
- Engineering
- Medical
- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- (Other) (Please Specify):

**28. What is the highest degree or level of school you completed in the United States?**

- Some high school / secondary school
- High school graduate / GED
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade, technical or vocational training
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Professional Degree (Ex: M.D., D.O., PharmD., D.M.D.)
- Doctorate (Ph.D.)
- N/A, no course work in US

**29. What was your field of study in the United States?**

- Business
- Engineering
- Medical
- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- (Other) (Please Specify):

## Demographic Information

### **30. Please identify your gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Non-Binary
- Prefer not to say

### **31. What is your age?**

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years or older

### **32. How do you identify racially? (Select all that apply)**

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer not to say

### **33. What is your country of origin?**

- Fill-in:

### **34. How long have you lived in Pennsylvania?**

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 2 to 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- Over 5 years

# Appendix B - Survey Press Release



February 10, 2021

## Department Of State Asks New Pennsylvanians About Experiences With Professional Licensure

**Harrisburg, PA** — As part of the Wolf Administration's ongoing commitment to remove barriers to professional licensing, the Pennsylvania Department of State (DOS) has launched [a survey for new Pennsylvanians](#) to better understand their experiences in gaining professional licensure in the commonwealth and to reduce unnecessary roadblocks to licensure in the future.

[The New Pennsylvanians Occupational Licensure Survey](#) will study the effects of occupational licensure on the immigrant, refugee and asylee communities. The survey is part of a \$422,000, [three-year grant](#) Gov. Wolf secured from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2018 to reduce excessive occupational licensing requirements and explore alternative approaches, such as professional certification, that maintain public health and safety.

To understand the experiences and needs of new Pennsylvanians, the DOS survey asks about topics such as language access, education, occupational licensing, licensure portability, employment and barriers related to professional licensing. Feedback from survey participants will be used to develop recommendations to assist the immigrant, refugee and asylee communities in obtaining professional licensure in Pennsylvania.

"Immigrant communities are part of the lifeblood of America, enriching the areas where they live and work," said Acting Secretary of State Veronica Degraffenreid. "As the agency that licenses professionals across the commonwealth, it is the Department of State's responsibility to improve licensure processes so that new Pennsylvanians can find employment and thrive here."

The New Pennsylvanians Occupational Licensure Survey is available in multiple languages, including [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Hindi](#), [Korean](#), [Russian](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#). All responses will be kept confidential. The survey for new Pennsylvanians will run until the end of July, and the findings from this study will be made available by the end of 2021.

Building on the Governor's efforts to make state government more responsive to the needs of Pennsylvanians, the Department of State is focused on removing barriers to employment so skilled workers can enter the careers of their choice, strengthen the workforce, and grow Pennsylvania's economy. Among recent improvements to licensure laws in Pennsylvania, [Act 41 of 2019](#) made it easier for professionals with out-of-state licenses, including military spouses, to become licensed in the commonwealth. In addition, [Act 53 of 2020](#) removed barriers to professional licensure for people with criminal convictions.

For more information about professional licensing in Pennsylvania, [visit the Department of State website](#).