

**Commerce Committee  
Public Hearing  
February 10, 2023  
Testimony  
by  
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Romania and Founder of “CT for Ukraine Refugee Matching Program”**

HB 6585 AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY TO PROMOTE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT USING THE GLOBAL ENTREPRENEUR IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM AS A MODEL

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of CT-based employers of foreign graduates in support of HB 6585, concerning the establishment of a working group to study and make recommendations regarding the feasibility of leveraging the H-1B visa cap exemption to encourage high-value employment and promote workforce development in Connecticut.

I am a Partner at the law firm of Murtha Cullina and Chair of a practice focusing exclusively on Immigration Law. As an Immigration attorney I have been representing small and medium-sized CT-based employers for almost 17 years with sponsoring H-1B work visas to employ foreign students and graduates primarily from CT colleges and universities. I have also been presenting extensively to foreign students in CT campuses on their visa options after graduation and I regularly represent them with applying for visas and green cards to stay and thrive in Connecticut. I enjoy doing so not only from a professional but also from a personal perspective, having been an international student myself and thus intimately familiar with the challenges they face to secure visas under a broken and confusing US federal immigration system.

On the diplomatic side, as Honorary Consul of Romania to CT I have been establishing cross-border partnerships and student exchange programs between CT and Romanian educational institutions. Additionally, after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, I founded the CT for Ukraine Refugee Matching Program which brought 88 Ukrainian refugees to CT to date and has 300+ more who have asked for relocation to CT.

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Wearing all these hats exposes me to the various barriers faced by CT employers to petition for visas and by foreign students and immigrant populations to integrate into the CT workforce via the H-1B or other employer-sponsored visas.

**THE LAW:** The national tragedy unfolding before us is that the most popular work visa – the H-1B – is available to a maximum of 85,000 foreign professionals sponsored by their employers every year (the “H-1B Cap”) since the 1980s. Unfortunately the H-1B Cap is woefully inadequate for 21<sup>st</sup> century US economy, with nearly 484,000 registrations in March 2022 vying for the coveted 85,000 spots as part of the annual H-1B lottery, and the US Congress is not likely to effect immigration reform any time soon.

There are exceptions to the H-1B Cap – called “**H-1B cap-exempt visas**” – for universities, non-profit entities affiliated with universities, and even private companies with an office on university premises where the foreign national would be working on collaborative projects with the university to further the fundamental mission of the university. As you can see, **university involvement is KEY** and is what confers H-1B cap-exempt status.

**UCONN TIP:** A perfect example of an H-1B cap exempt zone is the Uconn TIP program where several private companies **with offices on Uconn TIP campus** have successfully petitioned for H-1B cap-exempt visas for global STEM talent without being subject to the 85,000 H-1B cap and with the ability to apply anytime around the year, not only in March. In other words, companies registered on Uconn TIP campus have access to **unlimited numbers of H-1B visas**.

While most of these immigration laws and policies are decided at the federal level, there is much that states can do to leverage these hidden gems – the H-1B cap-exempt visas:

- **H-1B Cap Exempt Zones on university campuses (the Uconn TIP model):** create several Uconn-TIP-like H-1B Cap Exempt Zones around CT universities - spaces that serve a strategic university discipline/ fundamental goal such as R&D, advanced manufacturing, insurance, bioscience, Central & Eastern European collaboration, commercial aerospace, entrepreneurship & innovation, etc - and populate them with private companies which can open offices on such university premises and engage with the university on collaborative projects in that discipline. That way, private companies can tap UNLIMITED global talent on H-1B visas.
- **H-1B Concurrent Employment or the MA Global Entrepreneurs in Residence (GEIR) Model:** universities to employ the graduate part-time, if even for 5-8 hours a week, such that a private employer can petition for a separate cap-exempt H-1B visa for that person to work off campus at employer’s offices.
- **Creating a “Pipeline to the American Dream”:** having more H-1Bs being sponsored in CT means more green card sponsorships should follow, and then more workers available to the defense industry which requires at a minimum a green card (or permanent residence).
- **Benefits for CT colleges & universities** in attracting foreign students because of the Pipeline to the American Dream approach that is available to them after graduation.

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- **Benefits to CT as a beam of hope attracting foreign graduates & entrepreneurs** from other states into our workforce in unlimited numbers (limited only by local labor market demand).

After many years raising these issues in the local business communities, I am honored to see interest from organizations such as the CBIA, Uconn Global Affairs, Quinnipiac University Central European Institute, CT Innovations, AdvanceCT, CTNext and others with whom I had engaged in informal discussion under the “CT Global Talent Initiative”. This bill will assist us to engage in more formal discussions with necessary stakeholders which would result in concrete measures to address workforce shortages and attract entrepreneurs using the tools of the H-1B cap exempt visa. It is a great win-win for our local industries, universities, foreign graduates and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Connecticut should catch up with Massachusetts and stay ahead of other states in retaining its foreign graduates and attracting them from other states.

Thank you and please feel free to contact me with any questions.