

Professional Licensing Is Rigorous for a Reason

By John Johnson and Skip Brazier

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In statehouses across America, there has been discussion in recent months around changing occupational licensing laws. These are laws that set the requirements to become and remain a member of various professions in our society. Governor Ron DeSantis [indicated in a recent press conference](#) that the issue will be at the top of the agenda for lawmakers in Tallahassee in 2020.

While we understand Governor DeSantis' desire to lower barriers for Floridians entering occupations by eliminating unnecessary requirements, we ask Florida leaders to be mindful of potential unintended consequences for professions – and the professionals in them – that oversee systems vital to Floridians' safety, health, and financial interests.

Engineers, surveyors, architects, landscape architects, and certified public accountants (CPAs) are professions that are responsible for everything from the physical integrity of buildings to the fiscal integrity of financial systems. They design and build homes, roads, bridges, and stormwater systems; they ensure the probity of our state and national economies as well as large and small businesses. For such jobs, broad-brush proposals intended to relax licensing requirements can weaken the standards that allow us to live securely and freely and rely on trustworthy guidance when our lives require it – when, for instance, we decide to build a house or start a business.

To that end, any conversation around licensing reform would be well-served to acknowledge that for some professions, rigorous licensing is not only desirable, but appropriate and necessary.

The [Alliance for Responsible Professional Licensing](#) (ARPL) was formed to educate policymakers and the public about the importance of rigorous professional licensing for highly complex, technical professions that protect and enhance our health and welfare, as well as the public trust.

The public rightly expects a baseline level of expertise and accountability when it comes to these professions, in which so much trust is required. The best way to meet this expectation is to require rigorous and ongoing education, examination, and experience through professional licensing. These requirements are not “barriers” to entry. They are standards to entry.

In an ever-changing knowledge economy, a professional license signifies that a person working in a highly complex profession has a level of qualification necessary to do their job safely and competently as determined by experts in that profession. It is simply unreasonable and unfair to expect a layperson to make that determination by themselves or by relying on online review sites. Moreover, shifting the burden of ensuring qualifications from licensing boards to

consumers puts the public at greater risk of being harmed or taken advantage of by unqualified or unscrupulous practitioners.

Legislation affecting professional licensure that is not carefully crafted will weaken or eliminate the authority of regulatory boards to act to protect the public and enforce responsible licensing standards. It will leave consumers with only expensive litigation or blunt inadequate market forces to weed out unqualified practitioners. Neither is a satisfactory outcome when you're the victim of unprofessional behavior – especially when considering how historically effective professional licensing has been in preventing harm from being done to the public in the first place.

Surely, the need to maintain rigorous licensing standards for certain professions is a common-sense idea on which all sides can agree in this important debate.

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Both Johnson and Braziel are board members of the Alliance for Responsible Professional Licensing (ARPL). You can learn more about the Alliance and the importance of professional licensing at www.responsiblelicensing.org.