PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE

Qualified Professional Licensure in Iowa by Design

Licensure is the key way for states to safeguard the public when the work of a business impacts the health, safety, and welfare of the public in physical or financial ways. Appropriate and smart implementation of licensure takes into account the difficulty of the work, risks to the public, liability of the business, and broadly supported standards for each.

It is critical to distinguish between highly complex, technical professions like architecture and engineering with clear impacts on the public, and the trade/vocational occupations that don't require the same level of qualifications to safeguard the public. The hallmarks of highly qualified professions are Education, Experience, Examination - the Three E’s - and national recognition of the need to be licensed.

Licensed professionals must master extensive, complicated codes and laws, in addition to the essential work of their discipline before they are authorized by their licensing board to seal their work, which certifies their work’s compliance, quality, and integrity. This level of responsibility and liability rightly requires rigorous qualifications, in addition to an exclusion of other occupations using substantially similar titles.

Recommendations for Action:

1. Distinction between Occupations and Professions, identify and regulate substantially different work differently and appropriately.

2. Qualifications Based Licensure, ensure that work with clear and significant risk to the public only be performed by professionals qualified to do so with the Three E’s and national recognition.

3. Alignment with National Standards, utilize standards developed by vetted, expert third parties in collaboration with licensing boards from all 50 states.

Current Iowa Law:

- Iowa law, Chapter 544, is a proven set of regulations that have served Iowans well. This chapter and the rules established by the boards therein aligns well with national standards, providing effortless reciprocity and movement for professionals from state to state.

- The Building Code Official’s Handbook, developed by the licensing boards of architecture and engineering based on the Iowa Code, has served as an excellent resource and guide to all building construction throughout the state for the past fifteen years.

For more information contact AIA Iowa at 515-244-7502 or info@aiaiowa.org
Distinction between Occupations and Professions:

- All buildings impact the wellbeing of the public to some degree; some can be performed with minimal to moderate training, while others demand extensive and rigorous qualifications. Occupations are relatively simple and can be prepared for in as little as two weeks or two months. Occupations are also the primary drivers of concern about appropriate levels of regulation and licensure.
- Professions on the other hand require years of postsecondary Education, years of supervised Experience, and rigorous Exams – the Three E’s. This is because professions, like architecture, are highly complex and technical. Professions are commonly coordinated at a national level and rarely present regulatory obstacles. Cutting into the regulations of professions with one-size-fits-all legislation can undermine the qualifications that protect the public.

Qualifications Based Licensure:

- Professional licensure is effective in safeguarding the public’s wellbeing for work with physical or financial risk. Architects are responsible for leading multidisciplinary teams in the complex and technical design of buildings that people live about 90% of their life in. These teams can exceed a dozen members and their decisions impact everything from structural integrity and air quality to accessibility and productivity.
- Licensure works best when there is minimal overlap between disciplines, clarity about who is qualified to do a given job and substantially different, legally protected titles. This clarity supports enforcement by code officials and fire marshals, as well as customer choice. Clients, whether private or public, benefit from knowing who is qualified to develop their project.
- To earn a license an architect must at a minimum complete 5-6 years of college education, 3+ years of supervised experience, pass 6 exams totaling 600+ questions over 21 hours, and maintain 24 hours of continuing education every two years of practice. The content of all of this Education, Experience, and Examination – the Three E’s – prepares an architect to take responsibility for leading project teams, adhering to codes, and ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of the public, in addition to doing the whole architectural design of a building, inside and out.

Alignment with National Standards:

- The nationally coordinated standards for licensure in architecture are maintained by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, or NCARB. The council is composed of representatives of the licensing boards of all 50 states. NCARB has worked with jurisdictions since 1919 to develop, unify, and strengthen the qualifications architects must have to practice. In addition to all 50 states, NCARB works with the District of Columbia, four major US territories, and several countries we trade with the most.
- These standards provide clarity, consistency, and ease of mobility for licensed architects and those pursuing licensure, including students and military families (service members & spouses). These standards also provide Iowans a competitive advantage over architects based in more expensive cities and states.

Resources:

- Iowa Professional Licensing Bureau:
  - Engineers & Land Surveyors Rules & Laws: https://plb.iowa.gov/board/engineers-land-surveyors
- National Council of Architecture Registration Boards (NCARB)
  - Reciprocity: https://www.ncarb.org/advance-your-career/ncarb-certificate/reciprocity
  - Licensure Requirements: https://www.ncarb.org/get-licensed/licensure-basics