

Time for Michigan to walk the walk on licensing reform

Review licenses on the books, recognize those from other states and let people get into the workforce more easily

By Jarrett Skorup | March 2025

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has talked the talk about occupational licensing, saying she wants to make Michigan’s regulatory structure better. It’s less clear whether the departments she oversees, and the Legislature, will walk the walk.

Michigan licenses hundreds of occupations, covering 20-25% of the state workforce. Many licensing requirements are arbitrary or overly restrictive. Others make no sense — as in, not at all.

The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, which supervises state licensing, agrees, at least in part. Its report, *Cutting Red Tape*, “outlines recommendations that range from improving exam experiences, expanding reciprocity, creating new resources,

removing unnecessary requirements, and in some instances, evaluating deregulation.”

The state regulatory department focuses its recommendations on three areas. The first is to address Michigan’s critical workforce needs by eliminating some regulations and by making it easier to get licensed. Another recommendation is to reduce barriers to entry for licensed workers, while the third is to streamline and expedite various processes for citizens and businesses. Here are the most interesting and significant reforms the report suggests:

- “Expand reciprocity licensing to all qualified applicants from other states.”
- “Offer the plumbing practical exam more frequently in geographically friendly locations

throughout the Upper and Lower Peninsulas.”
(Currently, this exam is offered only in the Lansing area and only four times per year.

- “Eliminate the electrical contractor licensing exam as all electrical work already requires a licensed master electrician or journeyman.”
- “Allow minor regulatory offenses to be removed from licensees’ records.” (Currently, even something as insignificant as missing a continuing education requirement stays on the record forever, harming a licensed person’s ability to find work.)
- “Review and reduce hours of instruction needed for barber license. Create licensing option allowing mobile barbershops.” (Barbers need 1,800 training hours and to work in a set shop. Cosmetologists need 1,500 hours and can operate almost anywhere.)
- “Review and expand supervision and eligibility standards across similar mental health professions.”
- “Reduce continuing education requirements for physicians and podiatrists. Increase license cycle length for nurses and speech-language pathologists.”

These are all good, albeit minor, reforms. In our past work on licensing, the Mackinac Center has suggested three major reforms:

Annually review state licensing requirements and repeal the unnecessary ones. “There are about 180 occupational licenses on Michigan’s books. Many of them also exist in other states, but some are unique

to Michigan. Some entail reasonable requirements and ensure a basic level of proficiency for licensed workers. But others require training and costs that far exceed what workers face in other states.”

Recognize licenses workers obtain in other states. “Universal reciprocity of all occupational licenses, certifications and training would help (increase the supply of workers in Michigan). If the state would automatically recognize licenses approved by other states, businesses could hire more workers, medical providers could start serving the public immediately and employment opportunities in Michigan would grow.”

Review restrictions that block people with criminal records from getting a license. “Lawmakers should review every law that restricts people with a criminal background from obtaining a license, and only prohibit a license for people who committed serious crimes that are directly related to the occupation they want to go into or that present a meaningful risk to public safety.”

State regulators can make some of these changes on their own. The governor can make others through executive action. Legislators and the governor need to cooperate and do the rest. Let’s get to work.

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