

Doug Hoelscher: Remove red tape on Wisconsin workers

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While most state legislators across the country are dormant until next year, a Wisconsin legislative committee is busy trying to make “getting a job” a bit easier. This past spring, the Wisconsin State Assembly [established](#) the bipartisan Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licenses. The Committee is [tasked](#) with reviewing the current occupational licensing system and issuing recommendations for reforms, including state-to-state reciprocity. In other words, its mission is to find red tape and remove it so people can get good-paying jobs and have rewarding careers. The Committee’s work is a step in the right direction.

These priorities are similar to the ones established under former President Trump’s Governors’ Initiative on Regulatory Innovation, which promoted bipartisan efforts across the Nation to reduce red tape and promote workforce freedom. These included supporting state reforms to improve or eliminate burdensome occupational licensing requirements.

Wisconsin’s Study Committee on Occupational Licenses has already held a few meetings. Credentialing boards in Wisconsin administer more than 200 licenses, which generally fall in the categories of business professions, health professions, and trade professions. The Committee’s initial meeting highlighted a key reform sweeping the country: universal recognition of occupational licensing. Currently, [18 states](#) and counting are establishing this workforce portability. Universal recognition of occupational licensing allows any licensed worker from another state to practice in your state so long as he or she is in good standing. A border state like my home state of Iowa recently enacted these reforms, and several other Midwest states have acted, including Missouri, Ohio, and South Dakota.

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The truth is that unnecessary occupational licensing red tape [hurts customers](#) and patients by reducing the available workforce and raising costs. It also hurts the [poor](#) and [minorities](#) by making it harder to work and operate a business. Universal recognition of occupational licensing laws goes a long way to addressing these problems. Recent [research](#) found that counties in states with established universal licensing reciprocity have seen an increase in population from border counties in states without a universal recognition law. In other words, Wisconsinites are likely moving to Iowa and other states.

The Study Committee on Occupational Licenses [met](#) again on September 27 and will meet again on October 12, November 15, and December 13. Throughout the 5-hour long September hearing, we saw [examples and insights](#) of missed opportunities for Wisconsinites. A Colorado [official](#) highlighted his state's sunrise and sunset processes to protect the public with the least restrictive regulations necessary. And an Assistant Vice President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis [explained](#) that occupational licensing increases costs for consumers, reduces employment, and decreases economic opportunity.

In addition to much-needed licensing reform, Wisconsin needs better management of its current licensing bureaucracy. To say it's failing is an understatement. The licensing of health professionals offers stark evidence. Throughout the spring and summer, media reports have found future Wisconsin healthcare workers waiting months and, in some cases, more than a year to get licensed. The La Crosse Medical Science Consortium put a finer point on these challenges in its [submitted](#) letter to the Council. With a healthcare worker shortage, this increase in wait times is unwelcome news. A [social worker](#) waited 14 months to get licensed. A [counselor](#) waited 9 months. A rural [school therapist](#) waited months and only got licensed just before the semester concluded. Meanwhile, a new [report](#) found a nurse with 12 years of experience in another state has been waiting since March—more than 7 months—to get her license, despite Wisconsin being part of a compact for nurse licensure that is intended to make moving from state to state easier.

While Wisconsin's challenges with health professions licensure may not be [entirely unique](#), every state leader, including Governor Tony Evers, should want to urgently fix the executive branch's clear failure to serve its citizens effectively. Even though Governor Evers did not join the bipartisan Governors' Initiative on Regulatory

Innovation in 2019, he and his team could learn a thing or two from other states that are clearing red tape and processing timely healthcare worker applications. In [Florida](#), on average, it takes just a day or two to process the initial application for more than 200 different healthcare professions. In [Missouri](#), the average nurse gets his or her temporary license within 4 to 11 days. And in [Iowa](#), veterans applying or renewing for a nurse license get their entire applications processed on average in 5 to 6 weeks.

Delays, inaction, and lack of reform put Wisconsin workers and those who depend on them at risk. If action is not swift, more qualified Wisconsin workers, including desperately needed healthcare professionals, could be moving to Iowa soon.

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