

Rethinking Occupational Licensure:
Removing Barriers to Occupational Licensure for all Pennsylvanians

Veronica Degraffenreid, Acting Pennsylvania Secretary of State

Project Description:

With the United States and Pennsylvania trending towards licensing more professions, the Department of State (DOS) recognized that studying the effects occupational licensing has on the Commonwealth's constituents is vital to understanding its relationship to economic growth and development. To proceed with this endeavor, DOS was able to secure a \$422,000 three-year research grant from the U.S. Department of Labor for a project entitled – *State Occupational Licensing Review and Reform*. Grant funding was used to fund several research projects that intend to reduce excessive occupational licensing requirements for all Pennsylvanians and promote policies that expand the pool of qualified professionals working in the Commonwealth.

Projects produced from this grant include a 50-State Occupational Licensure Requirement Comparison Report, Occupational Licensure “Snapshots” which provide a clear and concise roadmap for individuals interested in applying for a license, studies on the challenges faced by veterans and military spouses as well as immigrant, refugees, and asylees when attempting to obtain occupational licensure, and finally, the development of a Military Occupational “Crosswalk” to ensure veterans experience a consistent transition in the licensure application process.

Subject Area:

Occupational Licensure / Workforce Development / Employment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

History

Occupational licensure is a form of government regulation requiring a license to pursue a particular profession for compensation. Professions that can have a large negative effect on individuals, like physicians, public accountants, and pharmacists require occupational licenses. Licensing creates a regulatory barrier to entry into licensed occupations, and this results in higher income for those with licenses and usually higher costs for consumers.

In the 1950s, just 5% of U.S. workers were required to hold an occupational license, meaning they completed additional schooling or training and passed an exam to become licensed to practice the profession in a certain state. Today, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 23% of full-time workers have an occupational license. This uptick in licensed workers is the direct result of the growth of occupational licensing laws. Recent research estimates that 20.2% of Pennsylvania workers are currently required to be professionally licensed.

With the United States and Pennsylvania trending towards licensing more professions, the Department of State (DOS) recognized that studying the effects occupational licensing has on the Commonwealth's constituents is vital to understanding its relationship to economic growth and development. To proceed with this endeavor, DOS was able to secure a \$422,000 three-year research grant from the U.S. Department of Labor for a project entitled – *State Occupational Licensing Review and Reform*. Grant funding was used to fund several research projects that intend to reduce excessive occupational licensing requirements for all Pennsylvanians and promote policies that expand the pool of qualified professionals working in the Commonwealth.

Impact/Results

Research conducted for this grant project resulted in the creation of several projects aimed at reducing barriers to occupational licensure for Pennsylvania workers, including:

- [**50 State Comparison Report: A Comparison of State Occupational Licensure Requirements and Processes**](#) – This report compares licensing requirements for all occupations licensed under DOS (approximately 100 occupations) to those of the licensure requirements for the other 49 US states. It includes comprehensive data on the accessibility, educational and experience requirements, criminal history policies, continuing education requirements, renewal terms, fees, and reciprocity requirements for the Commonwealth and its sister states. The report found that Pennsylvania's professional and occupational licensing requirements are equivalent to or less stringent than those of other states, and its licensing fees are lower than the national average. In those areas where Pennsylvania exceeded the national average for any requirement, the report recommends that the appropriate state licensing board evaluate the excess requirement to determine if it is necessary to protect public health and safety and to ensure it does not create an unnecessary barrier to licensure and employment.
- [**Occupational Licensure "Snapshots"**](#) – DOS created one-page "Snapshots" with descriptions of licensing requirements for nearly 100 occupations regulated by Pennsylvania's [29 professional licensing boards and commissions](#). From certified public accountants to veterinary technicians, Pennsylvania's 900,000 licensed professionals, as well as applicants for new licenses, find it easy to locate information on their profession's degree, examination and continuing education requirements; initial licensing and renewal fees; and reciprocity policies with other states. These handy "Snapshots" continue the Department's effort to make the licensure process more accessible to all. Members of the public have found the "Snapshots" provide a helpful and concise roadmap to assist in navigating requirements for their occupational license application.

- **[Veterans Licensure Survey](#)** – In order to understand the challenges veterans and military spouses face in relation to occupational licensure, DOS launched a survey asking current service members, veterans, and their family members about their experience in transferring their occupational license from the military to the private and public sectors. Survey questions focused on license portability, reciprocity policies among states and the overall transition from military to civilian employment. More than 200 veterans and military spouses responded to the online survey.

Findings from the survey included:

- Translating military credentials and work experience to satisfy state occupational license requirements poses a significant barrier to veterans.
- Respondents reported that "acceptance of military training, education and experience" and license fee waivers would be most beneficial to veterans and military spouses applying for occupational licenses.

These findings led to the following policy recommendations:

- Support recognition of military training and experience to satisfy licensure requirements.
- Establish processes to expedite review of license applications for veterans and military spouses.
- Institute waivers of initial licensure fees for military spouses.
- Increase veteran and military spouse representation on state licensing boards.
- Allow veterans to be licensed by examination.
- Work with state educational and technical institutions and the U.S. Department of Defense to develop bridge programs to fill gaps in training for veterans returning to the civilian workforce.

- **Military Occupational Crosswalk** – DOS is near completion of a military ‘occupational crosswalk’ to identify and relate civilian career opportunities and requirements to veterans’ military experience. The crosswalk will guide veterans in translating their education, certification, training, and skills into professional credentials which in turn can be used to fulfill occupational licensing standards. The crosswalk contains over 350 military occupations, representing all five branches of the armed forces, with almost 70% of the occupations residing in the healthcare field.

The goal of the crosswalk is to educate the state legislature, licensing boards and commissions, the veteran community, and employers on how military training and experience aligns directly with civilian education and work experience. The crosswalk is to be used as a tool to ensure veterans experience a consistent transition in the licensure application process. The military occupations featured are matched to nearly 100 licensed professions administered by the professional licensing boards and commissions in Pennsylvania. The crosswalk will also assist veterans identify any gaps in their training and/or experience that must be filled to meet their personal career goals. The “crosswalk” is set to be released on the DOS website in Q1 2022.

- **[New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey](#)** – With the intent to identify and reduce unnecessary roadblocks to licensure for members of the immigrant, refugee, and asylee communities, DOS issued a survey asking New Pennsylvanians about topics such as language access, education, licensure portability, employment, and barriers related to occupational licensing. The survey was available in multiple languages, including Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Over 500 individuals responded to the online survey.

Findings from the survey included:

- The most common barrier to licensure for “New Pennsylvanians” is that the application process is confusing and not user-friendly for non-English speakers.
- Some respondents expressed frustration that they were told their foreign education would not be accepted as a qualification for occupational licensure when they applied.
- Respondents reported taking such steps as furthering their education and gaining more work experience in order to qualify for Pennsylvania licensing standards.

These findings led to the following policy recommendations:

- Establish an Office for New Americans to assist immigrants with navigating the license application process and providing support in other key areas of professional development. This office would be responsible for carrying out the following measures to mitigate barriers to licensure for the immigrant community:
 - Develop a coaching/mentoring program that helps immigrants prepare for the submission of their license application and assist in navigating the licensure process.
 - Create a guide or handbook in the applicant's native language that clearly explains how to obtain a license, with step-by-step instructions and a checklist.
 - Administer programs that allow for more opportunities for immigrants to gain more work experience in their field. (Ex: Apprenticeship or Residency Programs)
 - Coordinate and provide technical assistance and grants to licensure applicants that may need assistance with covering the costs of a translator for a licensing exam and initial licensing fees.
 - Recruit members of the immigrant community to serve as professional and public members for one of Pennsylvania's 29 occupational licensing boards.
 - Promote fundamental pathways to immigrant integration, including ESL classes, citizenship preparation, workforce development, entrepreneurship, language access, community engagement and planning, and laws ensuring fair and equal treatment.
 - Champion the rights of immigrants and act as an advocate for local, state, and federal policies that support immigrant and refugee communities and create a welcoming state.
- Improve the license application website to enhance user-experience and address the uncertainty that exists within the application process.
- Promote further recognition of training, education, and experience from other countries.

Significance

Pennsylvania is leading the way in state occupational licensure research and continues to produce valuable resources to serve as a model for other states interested in examining its own occupational licensing standards and processes.

The *50 State Comparison Report* is an innovative approach to assessing licensure standards across the U.S., as members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, State Occupational Licensing Boards, the Governor's Office, and officials from other states have utilized the information contained in this report to influence decisions related to occupational licensure policy.

Findings and recommendations from the *Veterans Licensure Survey* were well-received and the report garnered enough attention that the U.S. Department of Defense invited DOS staff to present on the findings from this critical research in August 2021. The report also led to the drafting of [House Bill 1868](#), which is currently working through the legislative process. The bill has received bipartisan support, passing through the Pennsylvania House at a vote count of 200-0, and is set to be voted on in the Senate in the near future. House Bill 1868 takes the recommendations from the Veterans Licensure Survey and converts them into policy solutions and legislation that will benefit the veteran community.

Cited directly from the Bill's sponsorship memo, this act "adds provisions relating to veterans' licensure by providing for representation on licensing boards, for expedited license, for military experience in place of education criteria, for expedited temporary license, for relevant military experience, for renewal of license for deployed servicemembers, for fees and for reports." The passage of House Bill 1868 would be a major accomplishment for the study, as it transforms the report's findings and recommendations into a legislative solution to address barriers for veterans and military spouses.

Looking forward in Pennsylvania, the work to remove barriers to occupational licensure will continue to grow and develop. DOS officials strive to ensure Pennsylvania's license reform efforts will continue long after this grant project. The pursuit to improve the structure and processes of occupational licensure is continuous and there is always another goal to work towards. For instance, DOS is hopeful that the findings and recommendations found in the *New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey* will lead to the creation of an Office for New Americans in 2022.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Press Releases

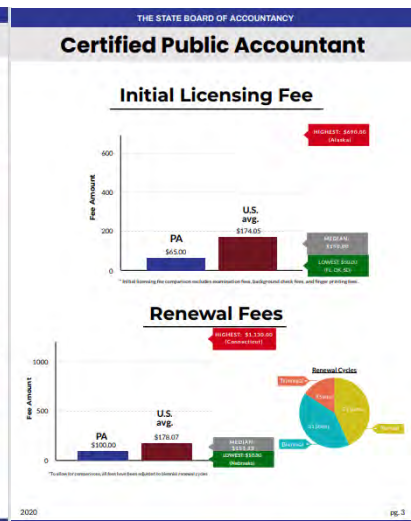
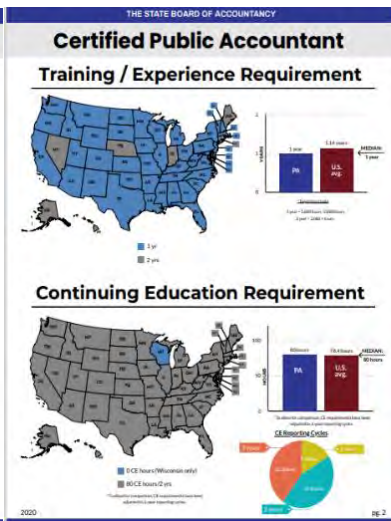
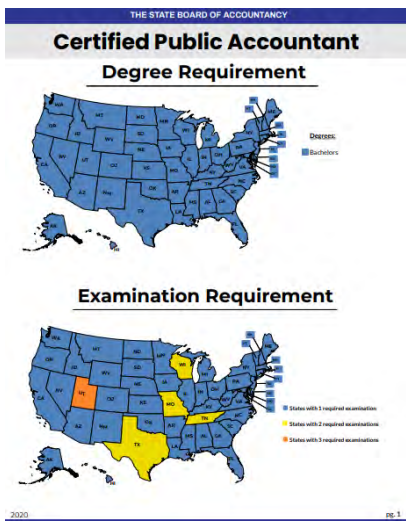
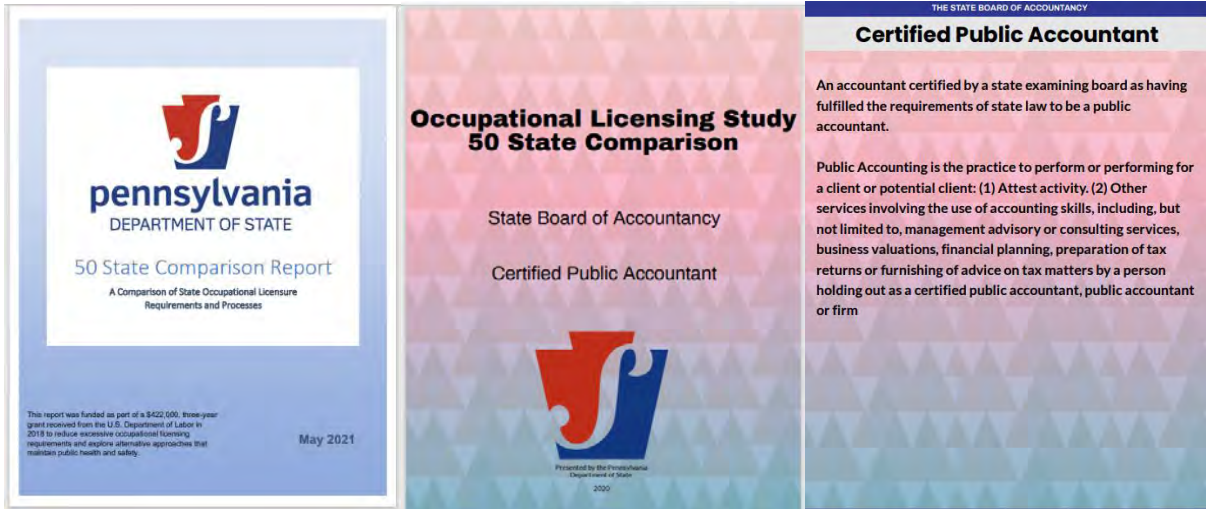
[Department Of State Releases One-Page "Snapshots" Providing Simple Descriptions Of Professional Licensing Requirements](#)
[Survey Reveals Occupational Licensing Challenges For Veterans And Military Spouses](#)
[Department Of State Asks New Pennsylvanians About Experiences With Professional Licensure](#)

Press Clippings

[KYW NewsRadio Philadelphia - Pennsylvania working to ease transition for veterans entering civilian workforce](#)
[Other Voices: Immigrants and refugees help boost our economies](#) – Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (mentions *New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey*)

Report Examples / Graphics

50 State Comparison Report – Cover Page & Example



Occupational Licensure “Snapshot” Examples

<p>Occupational Therapist Licensure Requirements Snapshot</p> <h3>Occupational Therapist Pennsylvania Licensure Requirements</h3> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> Four-Year Educational Program in Occupational Therapy</td> <td> 24 Hours of Continuing Education</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 1 Examination</td> <td> 30.00 Initial Fee</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 6 Months of Experience</td> <td> 55.00 Renewal Fee</td> </tr> </table> <p>Licensed individuals who treat injured, ill, or disabled patients through the therapeutic use of everyday activities.</p> <p>Occupational therapists help patients develop, recover, improve, as well as maintain the skills needed for daily living and working.</p> <p>Degree Requirement: Four-Year Educational Program in Occupational Therapy</p> <p>Applicant has met the academic requirements of an educational program in occupational therapy approved by the Board.</p> <p>Examination Requirement: 1 Examination</p>	Four-Year Educational Program in Occupational Therapy	24 Hours of Continuing Education	1 Examination	30.00 Initial Fee	6 Months of Experience	55.00 Renewal Fee	<p>Pennsylvania Department of State > Professional Licensing > Boards & Commissions Architect Licensure Requirements Snapshot</p> <h3>Landscape Architects Pennsylvania Licensure Requirements</h3> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> Bachelor's Degree</td> <td> 24 Hours of Continuing Education</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 1 Examination</td> <td> 60.00 Initial Fee</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 2 Years of Practical Experience</td> <td> 194.00 Renewal Fee</td> </tr> </table> <p>A licensed professional that arranges or modifies the features of a landscape or an urban area for aesthetic and/or practical reasons.</p> <p>Degree Requirement: Bachelor's Degree - Applicant must have received either:</p>	Bachelor's Degree	24 Hours of Continuing Education	1 Examination	60.00 Initial Fee	2 Years of Practical Experience	194.00 Renewal Fee	<p>Pennsylvania Department of State > Professional Licensing > Boards & Commissions Licensure Requirements Snapshot</p> <h3>Cosmetologist Pennsylvania Licensure Requirements</h3> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> Cosmetology Curriculum</td> <td> No Continuing Education Requirement</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 1 Examination</td> <td> 103.00 Initial Fee</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 1,250 -2,000 Hours</td> <td> 67.00 Renewal Fee</td> </tr> </table> <p>A licensed individual who is engaged in the practice of cosmetology. The practice of cosmetology includes the embellishment, cleanliness and beautification of the human hair, such as arranging, braiding, dressing, curling, waving, permanent waving, cleansing, cutting, singeing, bleaching, coloring, pressing, or similar work thereon and thereabout.</p> <p>Education Requirement: 10th Grade Education or Equivalent & Cosmetology Curriculum - Applicant must have completed the tenth grade or its equivalent and must have completed a minimum of 1,250 hours in the cosmetology curriculum at a licensed school of cosmetology. DR must have been registered and served as an apprentice for a minimum of 2,000 hours in a licensed cosmetology salon under the supervision of a licensed cosmetologist.</p>	Cosmetology Curriculum	No Continuing Education Requirement	1 Examination	103.00 Initial Fee	1,250 -2,000 Hours	67.00 Renewal Fee
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Veterans and New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey Cover Pages

<h1>Veterans' Licensure Survey</h1> <p>March 2021</p>  <p>Results & Analysis</p>  <p><small>The Veterans' Licensure Survey is part of a \$422,000, three-year grant received from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2018 to reduce excessive occupational licensing requirements and explore alternative approaches, such as professional certification, that maintain public health and safety.</small></p>	<h1>New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey</h1> <p>December 2021</p>  <p>Results & Analysis</p>  <p><small>The New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey is part of a \$422,000, three-year grant received from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2018 to reduce excessive occupational licensing requirements and explore alternative approaches, such as professional certification, that maintain public health and safety.</small></p>
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