



WORKFORCE PAINS:

How states can grow their skilled workforce through universal licensing recognition

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KEY FINDINGS

1

MORE THAN A QUARTER OF FULL-TIME WORKERS NEED OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES TO WORK.



2

BUSINESSES ARE STARVING FOR WORKERS, WITH MORE THAN SEVEN MILLION JOBS UNFILLED ACROSS THE COUNTRY.



3

OCCUPATIONS HAVE SIMILAR SCOPE OF WORK FROM STATE TO STATE, MAKING WORKER RECRUITMENT EASIER.



4

STATES CAN RECRUIT NEW WORKERS TO HELP GROW THEIR WORKFORCES, WHICH IS ALREADY HAPPENING IN ARIZONA.



5

UNIVERSAL LICENSING RECOGNITION PROTECTS THE PUBLIC AND CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LICENSED MILITARY SPOUSES AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS.



BOTTOM LINE:

STATES CAN GROW THEIR ECONOMIES AND ENHANCE THEIR WORKFORCE BY RECOGNIZING THE WORK EXPERIENCE AND LICENSES OF QUALIFIED WORKERS WHO RELOCATE TO THEIR STATE.

The problem: Occupational licensing requirements have exploded in recent years

An occupational license is a credential required by governments to work legally in a given occupation. Occupational licenses generally require workers to complete approved educational programs, pass exams, and pay fees.

More than a quarter of full-time workers require an occupational license or certification to work.¹ The significant role occupational licensing now plays in the American labor market has not always been the norm. Fewer than five percent of workers in the 1950s needed state-issued licenses to work.² The vast majority of this growth is not from growing employment in already-licensed sectors, but from massively increasing the number of professions requiring a license.³

Licensing is no longer limited to high-earning positions or those with real public safety concerns. Even middle- and lower-income jobs, such as massage therapists, barbers, cosmetologists, and auctioneers now require licenses in many states.⁴ As a result, licensing has created new barriers to entering many good-paying careers and has contributed to the shortage of workers nationwide. Additionally, these licenses effectively trap people in their existing state because, if they want to move, they often have no choice but to start the licensing process all over again.



The result: Businesses are starving for workers

America is experiencing the largest economic expansion in history, and the unemployment rate sits near its 50-year low.⁵ Employers—both large and small—are looking for workers to fill millions of open positions.


More than seven million open jobs sat unfilled across the country in 2019.⁶ These jobs range across industries, including health care, construction, financial services, education, and hospitality.⁷

Businesses are desperate for more workers. Nearly half of states have more than 100,000 job openings.⁸ In Florida alone, employers are urgently searching for workers to fill 428,000 open jobs.⁹ In Texas, employers are struggling to find the workforce needed for 591,000 unfilled positions. Employers in Alabama, Georgia, and Oklahoma respectively have 98,000, 229,000, and 85,000 jobs sitting open.¹⁰

Small businesses are hiring more workers than ever before, with nearly 60 percent of small business owners hiring or trying to hire.¹¹ However, they are struggling to find qualified candidates to fill those openings.¹²⁻¹³ The number of small businesses with job openings remains near a record high, despite increases in wages and other benefits.¹⁴

Nationwide, employers have more job openings than people to fill them.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ A whopping 44 states and Washington, D.C. have more open jobs than people looking for work.¹⁸⁻²⁰ Across the country, there are 12 open jobs for every 10 unemployed workers.²¹

This worker shortage puts a strain on state and local economies who are in desperate need of workers in nearly every industry, including sectors that often require workers to have occupational licenses, such as construction, education, and health services.²²⁻²⁴ The shortage also limits the choices for services available to American consumers.



**MORE THAN
SEVEN MILLION
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COUNTRY IN 2019**

The opportunity: Occupations have similar scope of work from state to state, making worker recruitment easier

While licensing costs and requirements can vary considerably from state to state, the scope of work and skills needed to perform these occupations are similar and studies have found “little discernible difference in consumer safety outcomes between states.”²⁵ The takeaway is that workers are practicing safely across the country despite differences in licensing from one state to the other. This is the case for several reasons.

First, many licensed occupations requiring formal education—including physicians, nurses, and dental hygienists—have moved towards national tests.²⁶⁻²⁸ Architects, engineers, and certified public accountants, to name a few, are required to pass comprehensive national exams.²⁹⁻³¹ Additionally, 34 states and D.C. utilize a uniform bar exam for attorneys.³²

In addition, skilled trade occupations often share common training and practice requirements from state to state. For example, many states utilize federal or state-registered apprenticeship programs.³³ These programs have education and training requirements apprentices must complete before graduating, receiving an industry recognized credential, and fully practicing their trade.³⁴

Finally, for many occupations, many licensing requirements are quite uniform amongst the states, including athletic trainers, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), sign language interpreters, massage therapists, estheticians, and veterinary technicians.³⁵ For example, EMTs are licensed in all 50 states and no state licenses EMTs without the equivalent of 100 hours of education or training.³⁶⁻³⁷

Ultimately, while licensing standards can vary somewhat from state to state, there is a lot of commonality between state standards for many occupations. This broadens the pathway for states to welcome in—and even recruit—licensed workers from other states.

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The solution: States should recruit workers to help grow their workforces

States have always competed for businesses, and just as businesses are incentivized by the right environment conducive to growth and innovation, so too are workers. Moving for new, better opportunities has always been a hallmark of the American dream, and it still is today.

Millions of Americans move for new opportunities every single year. In fact, more than 7.5 million Americans relocated from one state to another in 2018.³⁸ Nearly three-quarters of these individuals—roughly 5.6 million—were working-age adults.³⁹ More than 20 states saw at least 100,000 working-age adults move to their state from another—including Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.⁴⁰ **Most states now have 200 or more people moving there every single day, while 11 states have more than 500.**⁴¹

Absent reform, many licensed workers moving from one state to another will struggle to transition to their new home and will have a tough time filling open jobs if they must restart the licensing process.

States can help address this problem—and perhaps attract even more workers—by streamlining their licensing recognition process.

Arizona and Pennsylvania both passed universal licensing reciprocity in 2019.⁴²⁻⁴³ Policymakers in both states recognized universal licensing as a tool to eliminate costly red tape, attract much-needed workers, and promote new opportunities in their states.

The concept of licensing reciprocity or recognition is not new. States have frequently recognized work experience and licenses of military spouses and new residents for a handful of occupations through reciprocity agreements or compacts, but not universally for all occupations and workers—until recently.⁴⁴

With thousands of jobs in each state going unfilled—including many licensed occupations—states are not without options to find workers to fill those positions and grow their tax base, especially since the scope of work amongst licensed occupations is so similar from state to state. If states are not careful, they will be left behind by those states making their workforces more welcoming and attractive to skilled professionals.



**ARIZONA AND
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AND ATTRACTING
WORKERS**

The how: Three key components of worker recruitment

As workers move throughout the country, their training, skills, and work experience travel with them, but often recognition of them does not. States can make worker recruitment a priority by embracing the licenses and work experience of transferring military spouses and relocating professionals from other states.

Millions of open jobs available across the country are for licensed professions, and filling those positions is a top priority for both businesses and states. That is why states should seek to simplify the licensing process for trained and experienced workers moving to their state. This simplification has two parts: universal licensing reciprocity and universal licensing recognition.

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RECIPROCITY



RECOGNITION



PUBLIC SAFETY

1. UNIVERSAL LICENSING RECIPROCITY

First, states can simplify the licensing process by issuing occupational licenses to military spouses and other workers moving to their state who are already licensed, trained, and qualified for the same job in another state. To account for any differences in licensing requirements, only workers who have been licensed or certified for at least one year and are in good standing would be eligible.⁴⁵

2. UNIVERSAL LICENSING RECOGNITION

Second, to further simplify the licensing process, states should grant licenses to military spouses and other relocating workers by recognizing work or job experience from another state. The variations from state to state in licensed occupations means many workers across the country are working in the same professions, but not all are licensed. In these occupations where the requirement to have a license is more inconsistent, states may, for example, require only those workers who have been working in an occupation with a similar scope of work for at least three years to be eligible to receive a license.

3. PROTECTING PUBLIC SAFETY

In general, burdensome licensing requirements do little to protect public safety or improve quality.⁴⁶ However, states can consider several options to protect public safety while still recruiting talented professionals.⁴⁷

For example, states can choose not to grant licenses to workers with unresolved disciplinary action or pending complaints, allegations, or investigations against them by any regulating entity, or to those who have had a license or certificate revoked for unprofessional conduct.

States may also consider a residency requirement. Recently relocated workers would be held to the same standards as workers licensed in their new state and would go through all required background checks before receiving a license.

The beneficiaries: Military spouses, working parents, out-of-state family members, and baby boomers

Many groups of Americans stand to benefit from universal licensing reciprocity and recognition—including military spouses, working parents, out-of-state family members, and baby boomers.

MILITARY SPOUSES

Frequent moves are custom for those serving our country in the military. In fact, military spouses are 10 times more likely to move in a given year than their civilian counterparts.⁴⁸ These moves create issues for military spouses and personnel working in licensed occupations, which many do. Between 35 and 50 percent of military spouses work in licensed or certified occupations.⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰

The good news is that most states have existing laws that make it easier for military spouses to continue working after being transferred—e.g., issuing temporary or short-term licenses, expedited processes, or full endorsement.⁵¹⁻⁵² Unfortunately, many states' processes are limited, and more work can be done to simplify the licensing process for military spouses.⁵³

WORKING PARENTS

It is certainly not uncommon today for both spouses to work. In fact, both spouses work in more than 60 percent of working families.⁵⁴ Couples with two working spouses may be hesitant to move to another state for a better job opportunity if one of them works in a position requiring a license. If they do decide to move, one spouse might be forced to go without work until they complete any licensing requirements.



**BETWEEN 35
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OUT-OF-STATE FAMILY MEMBERS

Millions of Americans move each year for new opportunities, but occupational licensing requirements act as an unnecessary hurdle, making worker recruitment much more difficult for states.⁵⁵ This fact makes it much harder for states to attract the relatives of family members who moved out of state during tough economic times to move back. Many states are also experiencing significant population shifts. In 2010, every state had more people under the age of 20 than people over the age of 60.⁵⁶ By 2030, most states are expected to have more residents over 60 than people under 20—more than double the number of states experiencing this today.⁵⁷ Labor shortages are already an issue for businesses, and based upon these trends, it will continue as older workers retire. This is especially impactful, considering nearly a quarter of jobs require occupational licenses to work.⁵⁸

BABY BOOMERS

While many baby boomers are soon leaving the workforce, many are simply not ready.⁵⁹ Baby boomers in licensed positions are negatively impacted by the lack of reciprocity or recognition in other states. For example, those wishing to continue working part-time to make their retirement last longer or who want to move to another state to be close to family might have to choose between leaving their position and starting anew somewhere else or not moving at all.

It is working: New licenses are already being approved in Arizona

The same week Arizona's licensing recognition law went into effect, licensing boards began approving pending applications for new licenses.⁶⁰ The Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners, for example, had more than 40 applications pending and waiting to be granted on the first day alone.⁶¹ In the few short months since the law went into effect, 15 different licensing boards have approved hundreds of new licenses.⁶² Better still, only three applicants for licenses under the state's universal recognition law have been rejected so far.⁶³ As a result, hundreds of workers have had their licenses recognized by Arizona licensing boards overseeing athletic trainers, occupational therapists, veterinarians, cosmetologists, architects, engineers, construction contractors, real estate agents, behavioral health counselors, dental hygienists, and more.⁶⁴

Bottom line: States can grow their economies and enhance their workforce by recognizing the work experience and licenses of qualified workers who relocate to their state.

Regardless of the reason, Americans across the country would stand to benefit from reduced licensing burdens—such as universal licensing reciprocity and universal licensing recognition—as reform would open up more opportunities for both workers and for states.

With shifting population ages and labor shortages, states must recruit new workers for much-needed positions. A clearer and simpler application process for experienced professionals decreases part of the licensing burden and makes it easier for people to find jobs.

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APPENDIX 1

OPEN JOBS BY STATE

STATE	OPEN JOBS	STATE	OPEN JOBS
Alabama	98,000	Montana	28,000
Alaska	22,000	Nebraska	53,000
Arizona	159,000	Nevada	63,000
Arkansas	69,000	New Hampshire	36,000
California	762,000	New Jersey	194,000
Colorado	151,000	New Mexico	51,000
Connecticut	70,000	New York	435,000
Delaware	22,000	North Carolina	277,000
District of Columbia	31,000	North Dakota	26,000
Florida	428,000	Ohio	276,000
Georgia	229,000	Oklahoma	85,000
Hawaii	30,000	Oregon	104,000
Idaho	39,000	Pennsylvania	290,000
Illinois	269,000	Rhode Island	28,000
Indiana	160,000	South Carolina	109,000
Iowa	77,000	South Dakota	23,000
Kansas	78,000	Tennessee	158,000
Kentucky	88,000	Texas	591,000
Louisiana	95,000	Utah	80,000
Maine	34,000	Vermont	20,000
Maryland	134,000	Virginia	211,000
Massachusetts	177,000	Washington	171,000
Michigan	216,000	West Virginia	47,000
Minnesota	137,000	Wisconsin	156,000
Mississippi	56,000	Wyoming	17,000
Missouri	156,000		

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

APPENDIX 2

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS RELOCATING FROM A DIFFERENT STATE ONE YEAR AGO

STATE	DIFFERENT STATE OF RESIDENCE ONE YEAR AGO (2018)	WORKING-AGE POPULATION WITH A DIFFERENT STATE OF RESIDENCE ONE YEAR AGO (2018)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION MOVING PER DAY (2018)
Alabama	109,909	80,371	220
Alaska	32,053	23,028	63
Arizona	274,283	184,849	506
Arkansas	73,373	50,194	138
California	500,904	386,635	1,059
Colorado	240,212	183,445	503
Connecticut	84,538	62,924	172
Delaware	34,293	24,730	68
District of Columbia	47,447	43,113	118
Florida	588,233	377,091	1,033
Georgia	274,257	192,716	528
Hawaii	54,146	38,489	105
Idaho	79,956	54,018	148
Illinois	207,259	164,713	451
Indiana	146,700	106,057	291
Iowa	74,534	56,843	156
Kansas	96,220	67,980	186
Kentucky	110,986	83,562	229
Louisiana	81,819	58,144	159
Maine	34,750	25,369	70
Maryland	163,981	122,491	336
Massachusetts	143,856	119,383	327
Michigan	139,050	103,501	284
Minnesota	101,104	80,289	220
Mississippi	68,329	47,657	131

APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

STATE	DIFFERENT STATE OF RESIDENCE ONE YEAR AGO (2018)	WORKING-AGE POPULATION WITH A DIFFERENT STATE OF RESIDENCE ONE YEAR AGO (2018)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION MOVING PER DAY (2018)
Missouri	152,883	114,007	312
Montana	43,410	32,756	90
Nebraska	54,221	41,028	112
Nevada	127,265	90,987	249
New Hampshire	48,227	36,546	100
New Jersey	160,072	118,565	325
New Mexico	59,676	42,014	115
New York	251,360	207,837	569
North Carolina	319,288	231,586	634
North Dakota	33,703	28,398	78
Ohio	197,494	152,253	417
Oklahoma	106,647	77,420	212
Oregon	141,024	107,364	294
Pennsylvania	253,689	195,272	535
Rhode Island	32,796	26,520	73
South Carolina	186,638	135,535	371
South Dakota	26,681	21,530	59
Tennessee	208,407	151,560	415
Texas	560,430	394,763	1,082
Utah	100,824	71,371	196
Vermont	26,252	20,863	57
Virginia	274,916	207,023	567
Washington	260,201	194,404	533
West Virginia	43,454	31,441	86
Wisconsin	114,810	88,478	242
Wyoming	25,762	19,180	53
UNITED STATES	7,572,322	5,576,293	15,278

Source: U.S. Census

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