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Gov. Doug Ducey set to sign bill to make Arizona the first state to reciprocate job licensing

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Depending on the state, it might take a license to wield a blow-dryer professionally. Or decorate the interiors of homes. Or teach ballroom dancing.

Arizona, like most states, requires substantial training to grant licenses for a wide variety of jobs. Now, though, Gov. Doug Ducey is poised to sign legislation that would lower the barrier for entry for workers who already earned a license for their profession in a different state. The bill just passed by the legislature would give workers reciprocity if they were licensed for at least a year and in good standing with their home state licensing body or board.

Ducey, 54, a second-term Republican and former CEO of the ice cream vendor Cold Stone Creamery, has pushed for the bill to make its way to his desk.

“We want Arizona to be the best state in the nation in which to live, work, and play, and part of work is building and scaling a business,” Ducey said of the bill in an interview with the *Washington Examiner*. “We’ve got more jobs available in Arizona today than we’ve got people to fill them. We’re one of the fastest-growing states in the nation.

“Just because somebody moves from the city of Chicago or Los Angeles, they don’t lose the skills that they possess when they cross the border, so we want to let them work and let them earn a living,” he said.

Several state legislatures and both parties have eyed lowering or eliminating professional licensing requirements in the last several years. Libertarians have led the way in advocating for cutting back licensing requirements, but the Obama administration also joined in with a 2015 report.

That report, a combined effort between the Treasury and Labor departments as well as the Council of Economic Advisers, found that workers in the most-licensed occupations were nearly 20% less likely to move between states than workers in professions with lower licensing requirements.

Not everyone agrees that those standards should be lowered. Professional associations argue in state legislatures, the sites where most of the debate over licensing plays out, that lowering standards risks public safety and risks lowering the quality of services.

Some professions have obvious arguments to make on that front. The National Board of Certified Counselors, a licensing body for mental health counselors, opposes the bill because it “would allow a license to be issued without adhering to the current Arizona state requirements.”

Others are less obvious. Cosmetology is one of the most popular licenses in Arizona, and the state board requires a license to blow-dry hair or attach eyelash extensions.

“I think there’s a big risk to uneducated, unlicensed people to work on the public,” said Karla Klodfelter, a lobbyist for the Arizona Cosmetology Association, which did not oppose the reciprocity bill but does oppose a separate effort to lower the number of hours necessary to be licensed for salon work in the state. “There is that risk of the blow-dryer burning the scalp,” said Klodfelter, a veteran of the industry.

“Yes there is a cost to education, in whatever field you go into, but there’s a greater cost to the public for noneducation,” Klodfelter said. “I’m not sure why this unlicensed blow-drying is such a thing right now when there’s not a demand for that.”

Advocates for reform argue that licensing protects incumbents and creates unfair time and financial barriers for people seeking employment.

“It is blatantly uncompetitive in many instances and why the push comes not from consumers but from members of the licensed vocation,” said Clark Neily, a vice president at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute. “What really leaps out at you is the inconsistency with which occupations are licensed in which states.”

“Louisiana requires an occupational license to be a florist,” Neily noted.

The federal government’s own 2015 interdepartmental report rounded up results from 12 studies on the effects of licensing on the quality of work in fields like teaching, real estate, and dentistry. Only two of the studies found a noticeable difference.

Ducey echoed skepticism of arguments in favor of licensing.

“I think the arguments against this have become silly,” he said.

The governor said he hopes the bill, which he’s expected to sign into law this week, will become a model for other states.

“We want to lead other states, of course as an American I want to see strength in our nation’s economy,” said Ducey. “We believe that when we’re the first in the nation to pass this then other governors will follow.”