

Ohio has cut red tape for workers needing state licenses. Which professions could be next?

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- An Ohio state senator is on a mission to make it easier for people who need state-issued licenses to work.

"I'm all about taking government barriers down and letting people work," said state Sen. Kristina Roegner, a Hudson Republican. "Government should not be making it harder for people to do their jobs."

Ohio requires a license for [more than 640 jobs](#), and one in five people need one to work. These licenses come from a board that sets education hours, annual fees, and testing standards.

They're essentially gatekeepers, ensuring workers know how to wire a house or cut hair. But because licensing rules vary by state, new residents (even those with decades of experience) can be denied unless they go back school.

That's why Roegner's pushing Ohio to join interstate licensure compacts. Agreements that automatically license workers from member states.

"It's a bipartisan effort," said Roegner, [who recently announced a campaign for state treasurer](#). "Now it's to the point where my colleagues see a licensure compact they're like okay, we know what this is and what it does. They have literally been flying through."

Ohio joined its first compact, for psychologists, in 2021. That law was followed by compacts for nurses, social workers, general practice doctors, physical therapists, counselors, dentists, physician's assistants, massage therapists and audiologists/speech pathologists.

But it wasn't always this easy.

COVID uptick

States have drafted agreements to solve shared problems since the 18th century. They started with border disputes but grew to include emergency response plans and shared resources, according to the [Congressional Research Service](#).

But it was the COVID-19 pandemic, Roegner said, that pushed interstate licensing forward--especially for medical professionals.

Staffing shortages at hospitals created critical needs for travel nurses. These nomadic caregivers keep hospitals from hefty fines or accreditation losses for falling below state staffing ratios.

"Almost every citizen in Ohio and the traveling public are touched by nurses," Ohio Board of Nursing Director Marlene Anielski said.

She supported Ohio joining the nursing licensure compact and told Cleveland.com that about 6,600 (15%) of nurses come from out of state.

"We wouldn't have those if we didn't join the nurse licensure compact," Anielski said. "That's helping us take care of our citizens."

The compact also helps recent graduates who don't know where they want to settle. [Forty-two states](#) accept the compact's multi-state license.

"It's really making it easier on the licensee," Anielski said. "Now they just have one fee and its \$75 to renew."

Hospitals like the Cleveland Clinic were also big compact supporters, saying it lets their professionals provide telehealth services across state lines.

"With telehealth as the future of healthcare, this is especially critical," Chief Nursing Officer Meredith Foxx said in 2021.

Even the Department of Defense got behind the idea. In September 2020, it worked with the Council of State Governments to fund new interstate compacts.

Local control

The main argument against compacts is that they cede control over important jobs to people and boards outside Ohio's control.

"The Compact bill allows the original issuing state licensing board jurisdiction of discipline, which might be a different punishment than in the actual state in which

the nurse is currently practicing,” UAW Local 2213 Professional Registered Nurses Unit Susan Pratt said in 2021.

Every state gets a vote on compact rules, but you are ceding some local control.

“We’ve accepted that there might be some differences,” Anielski said. “But we agree on a lot of things.”

Compacts aren’t easy to negotiate. Anielski pointed to the one for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses. It’s launch has been delayed by different state rules for prescribing medications.

“I think some professions are more easily agreeable than others,” she said.

Cost of doing business

Burdensome licensure laws drive prices up, according to a [report from the conservative Buckeye Institute](#). They estimated as far back as 2015 that hiring a licensed worker costs 15% more than an unlicensed worker.

“Licensure has gotten out of hand,” Buckeye Institute researcher Greg Lawson said. “There is no reason to charge a \$50 annual fee to be a travel guide. Ohio is perfectly capable of joining the majority of states that do not license travel guides.”

On the flip side, licensing associations have long worried about accepting workers with less education.

The Ohio Funeral Directors Association [opposed licensing](#) out-of-state directors in 2022 because Ohio requires both a college degree and mortuary science program while Kentuckians need a high school education.

“This will become the simple workaround for those applicants who want to avoid Ohio’s higher educational and training standards,” OFDA Director Melissa Sullivan said at the time.

Lawson and Buckeye believe it’s important to have minimum standards, but they want to “right size” those qualifications.

For example, you can become a cosmetologist in New York after 1,000 hours of education. In Ohio, you need 1,500.

“Why is Ohio’s cosmology license better than New York,” Lawson asked. “Why is that much safer? If you go to New York are you going to have a terrible experience?”

On the horizon

Roegner failed to get a compact for teachers off the ground last general assembly. Questions remain about the extent to which Ohio could cede control over its teaching licensure standards. [The prior bill](#) never received a hearing after it was assigned to a committee, and it didn’t receive testimony for or against the proposal.

The first compact for this general assembly will be the Respiratory Care Interstate Compact.

“I want people to be able to work and do their jobs,” Roegner said. “And not have government stand in the way.”