



IWV Supports the Freedom to Work Act

May 12, 2021

Dear Members of Congress,

American workers are resilient even in the most difficult economic circumstances. The pandemic disrupted employment for millions of workers and caused countless businesses to fail, destroying opportunities and killing dreams. As the economy recovers, government should prioritize reducing barriers to obtaining employment and engaging in entrepreneurship. Yet, states are increasingly erecting new hurdles to work through occupational licenses. Independent Women's Voice (IWV) submits this letter of support for the Freedom to Work Act, which aims to reverse this trend and encourage states to reign in unnecessary and burdensome licensure.

The number of occupations requiring government licenses to work has exploded during the past six decades. While licensure for some occupations is warranted, many others are unconnected to public health or safety. Instead, licensing requirements are used to prevent new competitors entering the market, which keeps prices high for consumers and choices restricted.

Licensure can place costly, time-consuming, and unnecessary burdens on women and men who just want to work. Women tend to pay a heavier price from occupational licensing regimes. Because many female-dominated occupations are heavily licensed, they are more likely to need these government permissions to work than men.¹ The fees, training, and delays can be discouraging impediments for women looking for employment or to open small businesses.

Military spouses, immigrants, and workers with criminal records also face unique challenges posed by excessive licensure. The nation's 600,000 military spouses, nearly all of whom are women, face an astounding 33-percent unemployment rate often because licenses obtained in one state are not recognized by others.² On average military spouses move every 2-3 years and are forced to navigate a whole new set of licensing requirements with every relocation. States may not accept education and training obtained overseas, forcing skilled and experienced migrants to pursue their education and training all over again. In addition, about half of states impose blanket restrictions against individuals

¹ The State of Occupational Licensing Research, State Policies and Trends. National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017. https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/employ/Licensing/State_Occupational_Licensing.pdf

² Military Spouses Fact Sheet. Department of Labor: Women's Bureau. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/mib/WB-MilSpouse-factsheet.pdf>

with criminal records from obtaining a license.³ Employment is such a critical element to reducing recidivism, but occupational licensure restrictions block individuals from gaining a fresh start.

The pandemic presented an opportunity for states to temporarily suspend licensing regulations for medical occupations. Nurses and doctors were quickly able to deliver critical care to hard-hit areas by bypassing prohibitive red tape and bureaucracy. These reforms should be made permanent, and states should not be limited to just reforming health care professions. States should examine all of their licenses and implement reforms to lessen requirements, shift to less restrictive regulatory approaches, or reduce the scope of licensing requirements for specific occupations. Several states are already on this path, enacting broad reforms or piecemeal reforms for specific occupations.

The Freedom to Work Act attempts to encourage more reforms. It directs federal agencies to use their oversight authority to identify laws and regulations that may contribute to excessive licensure. The bill also holds states accountable for making efforts to reduce occupational licensure barriers.

IWV supports this bill and thanks Rep. Diana Harshbarger for her leadership on this issue and urges all Members of Congress to join her and support the Freedom to Work Act.

Respectfully,



Patrice Onwuka

Director, Center for Economic Opportunity

Independent Women's Voice

³ *Sic*