



BUCKEYE POLICY BRIEF

OPENING DOORS IV OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING REFORM IN OHIO

BY GREG R. LAWSON
OCTOBER 6, 2025

Excessive licensing requirements make it more difficult for middle-aged and lower-income workers without college degrees to earn a living. The additional time and costs of acquiring a license from state agencies and boards can delay entry into rewarding, better-paying professions.¹ For years, The Buckeye Institute has recommended relaxing onerous requirements and recognizing many licenses issued by other states—and the Ohio General Assembly has heeded that advice.² The 132nd General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 255, the nation’s most comprehensive occupational licensing reform legislation, inspired by The Buckeye Institute’s review and recommendations.³ The law requires Ohio licensing boards to justify the financial and regulatory burdens of each license under their purview, and it gives every board and licensing agency a limited six-year term with an automatic sunset provision requiring closure or the legislature’s reauthorization.

As in previous *Opening Doors* reports, The Buckeye Institute again examines the licenses scheduled for review by legislative committees and recommends eliminating or reducing licensing regulations, fees, and education requirements that disadvantage Ohio.⁴ This year, the General Assembly will examine licenses that were first reviewed in 2019-2020, including some issued by the Ohio departments of Health, Natural

¹ Orphe Pierre Divounguy, Ph.D., Bryce Hill, and Greg R. Lawson, *Still Forbidden to Succeed: The Negative Effects of Occupational Licensing on Ohio’s Workforce*, The Buckeye Institute, December 18, 2017.

² Greg R. Lawson, *Universal Licensing Reciprocity: How to Welcome Workers to Ohio*, The Buckeye Institute, January 21, 2020; and *Senate Bill 131 of the 134th General Assembly*, Legislature.ohio.gov (Last visited August 18, 2023).

³ *Ohio Governor Signs The Buckeye Institute-Championed Best-in-the-Nation Occupational Licensing Reform Policy*, The Buckeye Institute press release, January 4, 2019; *Ohio Governor Signs Landmark Reform of Occupational Licenses*, Institute for Justice press release, January 7, 2019; Nick Sibilla, *New Ohio Law Takes Aim at Occupational Licenses Which Cost State \$6 Billion*, *Forbes*, January 9, 2019.

⁴ Andrew J. Kidd, PhD, Greg R. Lawson, and James B. Woodward, PhD, *Opening Doors: Occupational Licensing Doors: Occupational Licensing Reform in Ohio After Senate Bill 255*, The Buckeye Institute, December 5, 2019; Greg R. Lawson, *Opening Doors II: Occupational Licensing Reform in Ohio After Senate Bill 255*, The Buckeye Institute, November 9, 2021, Greg R. Lawson; and *Opening Doors III: Occupational Licensing Reform in Ohio*, The Buckeye Institute, October 30, 2023.

Resources, and Education and Workforce, and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Among those under review, The Buckeye Institute recommends eliminating 19 licenses and reducing the burdens associated with another 20 licenses.

The State Board of Education issues many types of licenses, and more than those of some surrounding states. Although The Buckeye Institute generally favors eliminating licenses to streamline and simplify processes for getting teachers into classrooms, many of Ohio's education-related licenses make it *easier* for well-trained, mid-career professionals to teach in Ohio schools by not requiring them to acquire the traditional teaching license through a four-year education degree. Retaining such flexibility and resisting a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching licenses are important for keeping otherwise qualified professionals in the classroom and helping our students. The General Assembly should be careful to maintain this approach while exploring more options to make it easier for credentialed professionals to become teachers.

In addition to eliminating licenses and reducing their burdens, The Buckeye Institute also recommends three structural changes to improve Ohio's licensure review process going forward.

Expand Comparison to All States, Not Just Neighbors

The General Assembly should compare the state's various licensing requirements to similar obligations in all states, not merely Ohio's neighbors. Such a thorough comparison may benefit from new artificial intelligence capabilities that will assist and augment the state's review of ever-expanding regulatory codes, but expanding the review would allow Ohio legislators to better understand how Ohio's licensing regimes compare to growing states in the south and west.⁵

Review Business Licenses

When the Legislative Service Commission (LSC) asked agencies and licensing boards about the licenses under their purviews, several licenses did not satisfy the statutory definition of "occupational license." As a result, LSC did not compare those licenses to those issued by other states and omitted them from its occupational licensing report to the General Assembly. Thus, the relative burden of those excluded licenses has gone unassessed. As a remedy, Ohio should amend the definition of occupational license to include any license, including business-based licenses, that state agencies require for legal operation. Prospectively, agencies should include these reviews in their LSC submissions so that Ohio does not continue to impose higher burdens than necessary or prevent businesses from operating in the state.

Create a Permanent Legislative Body to Review Licensing Requirements

The General Assembly has done a good job using standing committees to conduct the requisite licensure reviews, but the process has become cumbersome and unwieldy for these committees

⁵ Guhan Venkatu, *How Has Ohio Fared in the Current Business Cycle?*, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, March 26, 2024.

to manage as they concurrently review other pressing legislation. Instead, Ohio should establish a permanent joint committee of members from both chambers assigned to meet regularly and focus solely on licensure reviews. The committee could be a standalone joint committee or a sub-committee of the Joint Committee on Agency Review. A dedicated body of legislators specifically interested in licensing concerns should manage the ongoing reviews, which will become especially important if data comparisons expand to include more states.

Table 1: Licenses to Eliminate⁶

License	Licensing Body	Recommendation / Rationale
Tough Man Licenses	Ohio Athletic Commission	Issue under boxing or MMA licenses. ⁷
Refrigeration Contractor	Ohio Construction Licensing Board	Issue under the HVAC license.
Motor Vehicle Emission Inspection and Maintenance Professionals	Ohio Environmental Protection Agency	Kentucky, Michigan, and West Virginia do not license.
Motor Vehicle Emissions Repair Professionals	Ohio Environmental Protection Agency	Kentucky, Michigan, and West Virginia do not license.
Nonagency Home Health Provider	Ohio Department of Health	Only Ohio licenses these separately from medical licenses. A non-agency home health provider should hold appropriate underlying license and there should be a bond or insurance requirement for those not working through an agency.
Person in charge certification in food protection	Ohio Department of Health	Only Ohio certifies this among proximate states.
Dietician	State Medical Board	Convert from a license to a national certification and reduce the initial and renewal fees, which are higher than in proximate states.
Limited Permit to Practice Dietetics	State Medical Board	Convert from a license to title protection for those receiving a national certification; and reduce the initial and renewal fees, which are higher than in proximate states. ⁸

⁶ References are made to comparisons in the Legislative Service Commission, *Occupational Regulation Report: 135th General Assembly*, 2025.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Become Credentialed*, Commission on Dietetic Registration (accessed September 12, 2025).

Mechanotherapist	State Medical Board	Ohio no longer issues these, and only one is renewed annually. No proximate states license this profession.
Naprapath	State Medical Board	Ohio no longer issues these and does not issue any renewals annually. No proximate states license this profession.
Commercial Nuisance Wild Animal Control Operator – Employee	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	Proximate states do not require this for individual employees, and Ohio has an operator license for the business.
Fire Boss	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	No new licenses are being issued; responsibilities have been absorbed into the foreperson gaseous mine certificate.
Mine Foreperson of Nongaseous Mines	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	Redefinition of mine makes this irrelevant.
Foreperson of Surface Maintenance Facilities of Underground or Surface Mines	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	No longer offered. Duties are combined in the Surface Coal & Auger and the Prep Plant/Tipple Foreperson certifications.
Mine Medical Responder	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	No need for separate license or certification but clarify that Emergency Medical Technician must be present.
Shot Firer Certification	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	Certification automatically granted with mine foreperson certification. No need for separate certification.
Art Therapist	Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board	Less than half of US states issue them. Instead, offer title protection for those certified by organizations like the American Art Therapy Association. ⁹
Music Therapist	Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board	Less than half of US states issue them. Instead, offer title protection for those certified by organizations like the American Music Therapy Association ¹⁰ or the Certification Board for Music Therapists. ¹¹
County Board of Developmental Disabilities Business Manager	Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities	No proximate states license this profession.

⁹ **State Advocacy**, American Art Therapy Association (accessed September 5, 2025).

¹⁰ **Public Requirements for Music Therapists**, American Music Therapy Association (accessed September 5, 2025).

¹¹ **State Requirements**, Certification Board for Music Therapists (accessed September 5, 2025).

Table 2: Licenses to Revise

License	Licensing Body	Recommendation
Athlete Agent	Ohio Athletic Commission	Reduce the license fee, which is the second highest among proximate states. ¹²
Home Inspector License	Ohio Home Inspector Board	Reduce the initial license and renewal fees, which are the second highest among proximate states.
Clearance Technician	Ohio Department of Health	Reduce the initial license and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Lead Abatement Contractor	Ohio Department of Health	Reduce the initial license and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Lead Abatement Project Designer	Ohio Department of Health	Reduce the initial license and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Lead Inspector	Ohio Department of Health	Reduce renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Lead Risk Assessor	Ohio Department of Health	Reduce renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Certified Radiation Expert	Ohio Department of Health	Eliminate fee and only mandate requisite certification from relevant national organizations such as American Board of Radiology (ABR) or American Board of Medical Physics (ABMP).
Radiation Therapy Technologist	Ohio Department of Health	Eliminate fee for active-duty military members and spouses, similar to Kentucky and West Virginia.
Nuclear Medicine Technologist	Ohio Department of Health	Eliminate fee for active-duty military members and spouses, similar to Kentucky and West Virginia.
Radon Mitigation Specialist	Ohio Department of Health	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Registered Environmental Health Specialist	Ohio Department of Health	Modify path to expedite new entrants.
Conceded eminence certificate (for physicians)	State Medical Board	Proximate states do not issue this license, but it makes sense for international physicians. Reduce the \$1,000 fee.
Physician Assistant	State Medical Board	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.

¹² *Ibid.*

Podiatrist – Training Certificate	State Medical Board	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Radiologist Assistant	State Medical Board	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Special Activity Certificate (for physicians licensed in another state or country)	State Medical Board	Reduce initial fees, which are the highest among proximate states.
Commercial Bird Shooting Preserve	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are one of the highest among proximate states.
Fish Wholesaler	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are one of the highest among proximate states.
Wild Animal Hunting Preserve	Ohio Department of Natural Resources	Reduce initial and renewal fees, which are one of the highest among proximate states.

About the Author

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