

November 2, 2017

Maureen K. Ohlhausen
Acting Chairman Federal Trade Commission - Economic Liberty Task Force
400 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Subject: The Effects of Occupational Licensure on Competition, Consumers, and the Workforce:
Empirical Research and Results

Dear Chairwoman Ohlhausen:

Thank you for focusing the Federal Trade Commission's efforts on the effects of licensure on competition, consumers, and the workforce. As the national nonprofit federation of state and territorial architectural registration boards, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards' (NCARB) mission is to protect the public health, safety, and welfare by leading the regulation of the practice of architecture. All U.S. states and territories require a license to practice architecture as a means of ensuring buildings are safe, both for their occupants and those nearby. State licensing boards act on the behalf of the consumer and the larger public—without the efforts of these boards, the public would be left unprotected. We strongly encourage and support reasonable regulation by allowing states the right to regulate themselves while allowing competition to thrive through flexible and diverse paths to licensure.

We fulfill this mission of public protection through the development and application of standards for licensure and the credentialing of architects, with key deliverables being the portability of licenses across state boundaries and continuous streamlining of licensure tools. By facilitating licensure, we and our state boards work tirelessly to ensure that architectural licensure protects the consumer and the larger public. We strive to provide access to the profession by implementing streamlined and alternative paths to licensure, while also maintaining rigor through education, experience, and examination. The NCARB Certificate also enhances competition by providing a universally-accepted standard for licensure, enabling out-of-state practitioners to openly compete for work with in-state architects.

To facilitate quicker entry into the profession, NCARB has worked with licensing boards and thousands of volunteer architects to streamline its programs, shorten the timeline to licensure, and provide greater flexibility in the workplace—without compromising rigor. In addition, today's environment demands a greater focus within states to offer a more integrated path to licensure, as well as alternative options to allow flexibility for individuals from all career paths. New NCARB programs now allow licensure candidates to gain experience throughout education and pursue examination while earning experience—and in certain states to pursue and complete all three at the time of graduation.

Architects aim to provide high-quality, competitive services to their clients that result in inspiring and innovative buildings that serve the public—the silent benefactor of the profession.

From designing hospitals that can lead to a patient healing faster, to producing streamlined construction projects using state-of-the-art Building Information Technology (BIM), an architect's over-riding mission is to design buildings and create spaces that serve and protect those that use them.

For architects to engage the public and gain hands-on experience that is in line with contemporary practice, our state boards work closely with NCARB to look at leading-edge licensure paths for future candidates entering the profession. Each of the 54 U.S. state and territorial licensing boards ensures the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare by establishing the standards necessary for architectural practice within its jurisdiction, and licensing only individuals who meet those standards. Although standards vary across jurisdictions, the path to licensure requires a combination of education, practical experience, and examination—all vital components of a path to prepare future architects for the significant responsibilities of the profession. Requiring this expertise of licensed architects creates an essential layer of protection for the public and serves as the foundation of a safe built environment in the United States.

NCARB has led a national conversation on moving licensure candidates through the pipeline at a faster rate without sacrificing rigor. Since 2008, the average path to licensure has been reduced by three years. Efforts that have contributed to that reduction include updates to both the Architectural Experience Program™ (AXP™) and the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®), created and administered by NCARB, as well as the development of several alternative paths to meet the education requirement for licensure and certification.

The AXP provides a framework to guide future licensure candidates through gaining and recording their experience. In 2016, more than 8,100 licensure candidates completed the AXP—the highest number on record. Several key program updates have contributed to this growth, especially the dramatic reduction in required hours from 5,600 to 3,740. Another key part of becoming an architect is completing the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®). Like the AXP, the ARE has also been reduced from 9 divisions to 6 divisions over the past eight years. With the AXP and the ARE re-designed to reflect the development of a project from inception to completion, the two programs, combined with accredited education, ensure that candidates are ready to become licensed and practice independently sooner than ever before.

NCARB has also created several alternative paths to certification for reciprocal licensure as an enhancement to license portability, including options for individuals with extensive experience in the field to achieve licensure, as well as new methods for architects to meet the education requirement by demonstrating their experience in the field. These paths ensure that the profession is accessible, flexible, and open to competition, all while maintaining the rigor required to provide the consumer with confidence that the buildings they live in, work in, worship in, and play in are safe.

Thanks to an improved economic outlook and removal of licensure impediments, the architect profession is growing. As of 2016, there are 109,748 individual architects registered across the

U.S. jurisdictions, and those architects hold more than 126,000 reciprocal (out-of-state) licenses. As practitioners look to expand their practices across state lines, ease of mobility is an essential business requirement for an architect and is important to consumer choice. To ensure the protection of the public, an architect in responsible control of the work is required to be licensed in the jurisdiction where the project is being constructed. Unlike the medical field, where the patient travels to the practitioner, the architecture field requires the practitioner to travel to the project. Therefore, it is common for architects to be licensed and pursue work in multiple jurisdictions at the same time. Qualified architects, empowered through the [NCARB Certificate](#), have the assurance that their credentials will be recognized across the United States. Additionally, the state licensing boards have confidence that a Certificate holder satisfies their specific jurisdiction's requirements for licensure.

Twenty-six architect licensing boards require the NCARB Certificate for reciprocal licensure and all 54 boards accept it. In 2016, more than 42,000 architects held an active NCARB Certificate—the highest number on record and a 4 percent increase from the previous year. Over the course of the last 50 years, the NCARB Certificate has become the recognized standard and the primary vehicle that enables multi-state practice. By empowering architects to practice across state lines, we aim to ensure that architects can gain and maintain access to a pipeline of work across the country.

Additionally, state boards use NCARB's Disciplinary Database to protect the public from unqualified and dishonest individuals, and to share information on adverse actions licensing boards have taken against architects and licensure candidates. The database is designed to assist boards in the process of evaluating candidates for initial and reciprocal licensure. State boards reported over 800 instances of disciplinary actions between 2010 and 2015. Through this national data-sharing initiative, architect licensing boards are ensuring qualified and trustworthy professionals are offering their services to the consumer, and ensuring public protection by upholding the standard of care recognized by the profession.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide commentary to the Federal Trade Commission, and should you or your staff have any questions please contact Joshua Batkin (202-879-0540; ibatkin@ncarb.org).

Sincerely,


Michael J. Armstrong
Chief Executive Officer
National Council of Architectural Registration Boards