

## Breaking Down Barriers for Cosmetologists

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Health and Human Services Committee

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Chair Carpenter, Vice Chair Bryce and all distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on the regulation of cosmetologists in the state of Kansas. I am the Director of Labor Policy at the Knee Regulatory Research Center at West Virginia University. The main takeaways of my comments are the following:

1. Occupational licensing can create arbitrary barriers for potential new residents.
2. Research shows that rigid occupational licensing restricts mobility by 7 percent.
3. While the cosmetologist compact can help cosmetologists, Kansas already has a more effective mechanism in place

Occupational licensing is the most restrictive form of professional regulation. The state of Kansas uses licensing wisely; just 15 percent of workers require a license to work.<sup>1</sup> Lawmakers should be commended for wisely balancing consumer protection with economic freedom.

Because licensing laws are the responsibility of states, they pose challenges for workers moving across state lines. Relocating often entails reapplying for a license, taking state-specific exams, and, in some cases, completing additional education or training. Moving is already a hassle, and licensing can make it even worse. We estimate that licensing laws reduce the number of people moving to a new state by 7 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, cosmetologists are among those most affected by these burdens. Cosmetology programs are notoriously lengthy, with just one third of students graduating on time and tuition far exceeding what is appropriate for their career earnings.<sup>3</sup> Worse yet, requirements vary significantly between states.<sup>4</sup> Forcing

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<sup>1</sup> Kleiner, Morris M., and Evgeny Vorotnikov. "Analyzing occupational licensing among the states." *Journal of Regulatory Economics* 52 (2017): 132-158.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Janna E., and Morris M. Kleiner. "Is occupational licensing a barrier to interstate migration?." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 12, no. 3 (2020): 347-373.

<sup>3</sup> Menjou, Mindy, Michael Bednarczuk, and Amy Hunter. "Beauty School Debt and Drop-Outs: How State Cosmetology Licensing Fails Aspiring Beauty Workers." *Institute for Justice* (2021).

<sup>4</sup> Norris, Conor, Edward Timmons, Ethan Kelley, and Troy Carneal. "Introducing a new state-level occupational licensing requirement database." *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2024): 182-199.

out-of-state residents to go through this education and training again is costly enough to discourage cosmetologists from moving to Kansas.

The cosmetology licensing compact seems like a perfect solution to this issue. It allows licensed cosmetologists from member states to practice in Kansas without undergoing redundant education and training, saving time and money. However, the compact has its limitations.

First, the compact would only help cosmetologists from states that are also members of the compact. Right now, that is eight states, just two of which are west of the Mississippi River.<sup>5</sup> Any cosmetologist from non-member states would continue to face the same barriers.

Second, cosmetology is just one of many professions affected by licensing laws. Other beauty professions—like barbers, manicurists, and estheticians—face the same inconsistent standards. Nationwide, over 300 professions require licenses, creating widespread mobility issues.

A far more effective solution is already in place. In 2021, Kansas expanded universal recognition to include 21 professions. Cosmetologists and other beauty professions are included in the current framework. If there are specific limitations for cosmetologists, addressing them through the universal recognition law would be simpler and more effective. This would be an even bigger win for Kansas residents, new and old.

Requiring new residents to complete arbitrary hurdles before they can work is costly. Allowing licensed professionals to bring their license with them increases worker mobility while leaving consumer protection in place. Reducing burdens for cosmetologists would be a step forward, but including them in universal recognition would be a bigger win for Kansas.

*Cenar Norris*

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<sup>5</sup> “Compact Map.” *Cosmetology Licensure Compact*. (2024). <https://cosmetologycompact.org/compact-map/>