

Proponent Testimony on Sub. HB 189

By Clara Osterhage

Before the House Government Accountability & Oversight Committee

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Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking member Clyde and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony on Sub. HB 189, jointly sponsored by Rep. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) and Rep. Alicia Reece (D-Cincinnati). I am writing to ask for your **support** and **expeditious passage** of the **occupational licensure reforms** to Ohio's cosmetology industry contained in Sub. HB 189 before the legislative summer recess.

I have given proponent testimony to this committee previously. Today I would like to summarize what I believe are the key components of HB 189:

1. The public, career tech schools are already producing solid graduates who achieve 1075 hours of cosmetology education. Don't let anyone fool you or tell you that they are "less" than the graduates of the private schools. If you ask most salon owners, they will tell you that the graduate of a high school cosmetology program can often be a FAR BETTER hire. How can that be, you might ask? There is no difference in their pass/fail rates, but there is a big difference in that public school graduates/licensees come to employers with NO STUDENT LOAN DEBT. Today, I have a number of employees whose wages I am garnishing because of their loan defaults. Don't let anyone tell you that the issue in paying back debt is tied to any specific brand or category of hair salon because starting wages in this industry are not unlike starting wages in any industry. You start at the bottom and use opportunity to make your way up – no matter where you start. With schools in Ohio charging up to \$28,000 for 1500 hours of cosmetology education, it is nearly impossible to be gainfully employed enough to pay that type of loan back. It is imperative that we fix this imbalance.

2. I am the consumer of the school product (graduates) just like all other salon owners. No one from the private school sector has ever asked me or any of my peers whether or not the students

are graduating with the knowledge and skills they need to get started successfully in this industry. The private schools will ask you to believe that more education will prepare students better to be “salon ready,” which is not true. Like other educational programs created to fulfill a government mandate for licensure, the obligation is to provide the student with minimal competency only. In the case of Ohio cosmetology programs, that includes preparation for passing the written and practical exams administered by the State Cosmetology and Barber Board. That is not to say that education outside of the mandatory hours floor should be disallowed—quite the contrary. If a school can demonstrate that its teachings are valuable to the student and the public, they should offer additional classes. This bill does not stop schools from offering more education. It simply equalizes the amount of education REQUIRED to obtain a license.

1000 hours for a cosmetology education is the MINIMUM number of hours that this bill requires. This is the number of hours that public school students currently achieve. Equity in required numbers makes sense. Importantly, private schools can continue to offer 1500-hour programs, and the students will still be eligible for Federal loans up to that amount (1.5X required minimum). Meaning, the schools can get paid if they offer programs of value.

This industry is not unlike the social work field of which I am familiar. I am a 1983 graduate of The Ohio State University with a bachelor’s degree in social work. Although I was licensed when I graduated - having passed the licensure exam and could have legally provided services to the consumer and even charge for them, I was no more ready to do that than the man in the moon, as my mother used to say. I had mastered the minimal competencies, which only prepared me to go to work in an agency that would provide me with the experience that I needed to continue to develop my skills and, if I was so motivated, to continue to build my career.

The new cosmetology licensee is no different than I was as a new social work employee. And for any school to tell you that the salon owners in Ohio are not prepared to aid the new graduates, they are not being honest. We have been doing it for YEARS. All of us. Private independent salons, mall salons, strip center salons, ALL salons. And, we are good at it. No one expects a new graduate to be an experienced professional right out of the chute. Clinic time is certainly needed, but nothing can prepare a new professional for the day they become personally responsible for the

services that they are providing to consumers. Only time, experience and coaching advances them to a place where they are able to do their work with the level of confidence that they need to be successful.

3. License mobility, pre-graduate testing, and the apprenticeship program are the other wonderful things that this bill provides. License mobility resolves the barriers to working and paying taxes in Ohio. Pre-graduate testing will eliminate the issue of folks graduating and never testing. And the apprenticeship program will give salon owners all over Ohio the ability to proactively respond to the private school closures that have plagued us over the past few years, resulting in the shrinking licensee pool. All three of these wonderful components of this bill will keep the pipeline flowing to fill the jobs that are waiting.

4. I do not have to remind you of the significant increase in attention across the board to occupational licensing. This reform is necessary. Yesterday, testimony was given by Massachusetts salon owner, Frank Zona to the US Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Tax, and Capital Access in the hearing titled, "Occupational Hazards: How Excessive Licensing Hurts Small Business." He employs 75 licensed individuals and is unable to expand his business, he says, because of licensing barriers.

Mr. Zona's story is my story. He provides the same gamut of benefits that my company provides to its workers - insurances, a 401k, and is looking to provide a student loan assistance program. He told the committee that he is challenged by the fact that he is already committing \$.65 of every dollar to labor costs. The challenges he describes include a 4% unemployment environment in addition to the licensing issue. He said, "There is only one way into this industry, and that is through a school program leading to a licensure exam. In Massachusetts that's a 1000-hour program. This is the fewest hours in the country, but it still converts to spending the better part of a year in school and spending between \$12,000 and \$22,000." While none of us are prepared for deregulation, we need to have reform - like this bill - that makes the license requirements contemporary and a better fit with the current realities of trades and professions.

In the true final analysis, we need to move beyond the weak public safety argument scare-tactics that opponents use to attempt to garner support. Each one of you engages in self-care and perhaps the care of family members involving brushes, combs, nail clippers, razors, and some of you color your own hair, use makeup, nail polish, heated hair tools and blow-dryers—and you do not have a cosmetology license. You purchased your self-care items without a license or restriction of any kind at the local drug store or grocery store—or even at a salon. And yet, you are here today without having harmed yourself or others. 1000 hours are enough to be safe. It is time to get this law passed to continue to grow the industry and implement these much needed reforms.

I urge your support and swift passage of Sub. HB 189 before the legislature breaks for its summer recess. Thank you for your time and consideration.