

Senate Committee on Labor and Business

Public Hearing, February 25, 2021

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 17

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Background:

The Oregon legislature recognized the unique situation of the communities situated on the state's far eastern border in unanimously passing HB 2012 in the 2017 Regular Session. That legislation created and funded a mechanism for identifying barriers and creating opportunities for our small slice of Oregon to more effectively compete with neighboring Idaho, respectively the Border Board and the Border Fund.

We in the Border Region live in the shadow of Idaho's booming growth. Correct or not, Idaho is perceived in our area as being more friendly to business, supportive of development, and appealing to residents. The Border Board has worked diligently over the past three years to identify areas of opportunity and to address barriers inhibiting economic development in the Border Region in response to this issue and as directed by this legislature when you created the Border Board.

The Border Board has engaged local employers, employees, government and civic leaders, and educators across the region in assessing the situation plaguing the Border Region. One issue consistently raised across those sectors is licensed workforce availability. For employers, the problem is simply a lack of a qualified workforce. "Unqualified," in this context, most often means lack of the appropriate licensure, not necessarily lack of training, skill, or experience. For employees, including those the board reached out to who are licensed in Idaho and not Oregon, the barrier most commonly cited is the licensure process. Real or perceived, the board has been told almost universally that the burdens of becoming Oregon licensed outweigh the relatively fewer opportunities in the Border Region for those already working in Idaho. But for that barrier, these workers indicated a willingness to work in Border Region.

The worker scarcity in the Border Region is broad and evolving, including: physicians, nurses, telemedicine providers, electricians, landscapers, and home inspectors. The pattern routinely observed is that a licensed worker new to the region will opt to attain Idaho licensure over Oregon in that it is faster and, reportedly, more user friendly. These licensees then accept employment in Idaho and start earning a paycheck. Ultimately, these workers tend to stay where they landed – which is not in Oregon. A similar experience is seen in the construction industry where it would make sense for the various trades to work on both sides of the border. Despite Oregon wages often being higher, these professionals choose not to work on our side of the border due to the 'hassle' factor.

Senate Bill 17 As Introduced:

SB 17 would allow Oregon's various occupational licensing boards to grant provisional licensure to candidates licensed in other jurisdictions to work in the Border Region while full Oregon licensure is pending.

Highlights of SB 17:

- Permissive, not mandatory:
 - “A professional licensing board **may** issue a provisional license...”
 - “A professional licensing board **may** adopt rules...”
- Applicants must certify that they are actively seeking full Oregon licensure and must complete that process within two years.
- Limited to the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region as defined by ORS 284.771.
- Each occupational licensing board retains control over terms of provisional licensure.

Practical Application:

The Border Board anticipates identifying areas of highest worker need in cooperation with local stakeholders. SB 17 paves the way for the Border Board to then work with Oregon’s various occupational licensing boards to pursue provisional licensure of those workers to meet that need in the Border Region.

It is important to note that nothing in SB 17 erodes Oregon’s high standards for licensees, which the Border Board recognizes and respects. Threshold levels to ensure those standards are met pending full licensure can and must be part of the process tailored by each licensing board and imposed on provisional licensure applicants. The Border Board and identified stakeholders look forward to being part of developing that process.

Some, but not many, of Oregon’s licensing boards currently have provisional licensure options. For example, Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology offers a provisional license for Speech-Language Pathology Assistants while an applicant completes the 100-hour clinical fieldwork requirement for full licensure, as well as a conditional license for Speech-Language Pathologists during their clinical fellowship. Similarly, OAR 333-265-0060 outlines the provisional licensure process for Paramedics in Oregon. We are confident that these successful practices can be models for other occupational licensing boards for application in the Border Region to efficiently and safely meet the region’s needs.

Call to Action:

On behalf of the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Board, I invite you to get to know our small part of Oregon. This legislature acknowledged the uniqueness of the Border Region and charged the Border Board with creating opportunity in the face of challenge. SB 17 is a critical part of the board’s work toward that end and, accordingly, we respectfully respect your support of the bill.