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Interior Design Licensing Oppose HB 1878 / SB 5754

BACKGROUND

The AIA/WA Council recognizes that it may be in the public interest to reserve the use of specific titles for specialized design disciplines in the building industry through title registration. Protection of titles is intended to assure the public that the person using the title has specialized education and precise, practical training combined with an examination specific to the discipline.

Interior designers are valuable colleagues and members of architecture firms. Architects often provide interior design services as part of their diverse practice. Only architects are trained to protect the public health and safety with a full understanding of building code requirements and the difficult task of integrating building systems.

STANDARDS FOR TITLE REGISTRATION

First, there must be a clear threat to public health, safety and welfare before new restrictions should be placed on an industry or use of a title. The discipline must be clearly defined and not in conflict with the discipline of architecture and standards of professional conduct must be established.

Qualifications for title registration should be based on an appropriate combination of education, experience and examination. Specifically, a title act must include:

- A four-year minimum professional degree or its equivalent;
- A structured internship with qualitative as well as quantitative criteria; and
- An examination that is task-related and validated by recognized testing agencies.

Systems of education, experience, and examination, to ensure minimum levels of competency, must be established *in advance* for any specialized disciplines seeking title registration.

Title registration must not preclude the prerogative of architects to use the titles, where fitting, in providing architectural services. In addition, the AIA/WA opposes granting titles to individuals through grandfather clauses. The AIA/WA also believes that use of a “seal” should not be granted to disciplines under title registration.

INTERIOR DESIGN LICENSING PROPOSAL

Unfortunately, latest bill draft does not address many concerns. First, there has been no demonstrated public need for this new regulation or demonstrated threat to the public health, safety or welfare from the unregulated practice of interior design. Other states that have reviewed interior design regulation have all recommended against state regulation of this industry. These states include Maryland, Colorado, Florida and California.

Second, the bill would expand the currently authorized scope of practice for interior designers by including the phrase “registered design professional.” This phrase is included in the state’s building code and RCWs and WACs to describe the professional responsible for approving engineering and architectural construction documents and for conducting structural observations.

Third, the bill includes education standards that are much weaker than the national standards in use by the interior design industry. The industry standard is a 4-year, professional degree. The bill requires only a 2-year degree.

Fourth, the bill includes a liberal grandfathering provision that allows persons to become registered without examination provided they have 15 years of undefined experience and two years of post-secondary education.

Fifth, the bill fails to recognize the more extensive education, experience and examination of registered architects in the same subject matters. It would require registered architects to get two additional years of education in interior design and pass another examination, even though they already provide interior design services, oversee interior designers work and train interior designers.