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Interior Design Licensing Vote NO on Substitute House Bill 1878

BACKGROUND

The AIA/WA Council recognizes that it may be in the public interest for the state to reserve the use of specific titles for specialized design disciplines. 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. State mandated licensing and title protection should be enacted only when the lack of regulation of an industry or profession poses a clearly identified threat to the public health, safety and welfare.

Architects support efforts to raise the level of professionalism in the interior design industry. However, state regulation of this industry is not needed to ensure professionalism or protect the public health and safety.

SHB 1878 WEAKENS PUBLIC SAFETY STANDARDS

SHB 1878 would enact new restrictions on the interior design industry. However it proposes weak education standards and expands their scope of practice into aspects of architecture and engineering.

There is no clearly demonstrated threat to the public health, safety and welfare from the unregulated practice of interior design. Other states have reviewed similar proposals and recommended against regulation of this industry. If the legislature believes this idea may have merit, then there should be a comprehensive “Sunrise Review” conducted, as required in RCW 18.118, prior to enacting new restrictions.

The AIA/WA has three specific concerns with SHB 1878. AIA/WA’s concerns are based on a duty to protect public safety and an accord previously signed with the interior design organizations (see the attached letter). The interior design groups now disavow the agreement, but the AIA still honors its provisions.

- **SHB 1878 threatens public safety by allowing unqualified interior designers to practice aspects of architecture and engineering.**
By defining interior designers as “registered design professionals” they would be allowed to approve and submit architectural and engineering construction documents for code approval. Interior designers are not educated or trained to practice in these areas of architecture or engineering. **Restrictions limiting their building code authority were included in the 2004 bill, but are not included in SHB 1878.**
- **SHB 1878 includes weak education requirements, allowing licensure without a degree.**
It allows people to become licensed with only two years of education and does not even require a degree. The nationally accredited standard is a 4-year professional degree. Washington State University offers a 4-year professional interior design degree and is recognized as one of the best in the country. **SHB 1878 would undermine the WSU interior design degree by allowing persons with much less education to claim they are equally qualified under state law.**
- **SHB 1878 includes permissive grandfathering.**
SHB 1878 allows persons to become licensed without a college degree and without passing the national exam, provided they have used the title “interior design” in their business. All persons seeking to be licensed should have an appropriate degree and have passed a national exam.

The AIA/WA urges you to oppose SHB 1878 as unnecessary regulation of the industry.

If interior designers believe there is a public need for new regulations, they should submit clear and convincing evidence through a sunrise review process as required in state law. This process would also document the entry requirements appropriate for the interior design industry. AIA/WA believes that the bill should support and not weaken the national industry standards for determining professional qualifications.