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Interior Design Licensing

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.

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

Interior designers are valuable members of architecture firms and colleagues on many projects. 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. If improperly structured, a new interior design licensing law may expand services to allow unqualified individuals to perform tasks for which they are not trained and that would put the public at risk.

The AIA/WA has worked with the interior design community on their proposed licensing bill. Interior designers have stated that their goal is to restrict only the title and not expand the currently authorized unlicensed practice of interior design into aspects of architecture or public safety impact.

Unfortunately, the latest bill draft does not adequately address many concerns. The bill’s definitions are confusing and overly broad. Its education and training requirements are significantly weaker than existing national industry standards. The standards previously mentioned have been AIA policy for over 15 years. They were established in coordination with and had the support of the interior design community at the time they were adopted. Up until 1999, the interior design community maintained its support of these clear and simple standards.

The bill also discriminates against architects by not equally recognizing their more stringent education, training and testing standards. The bill includes a professional “seal” for interior designers. The AIA/WA strongly opposes the use of a seal by title-restricted industries. A seal for interior designers would confuse building officials, clients and the public as to the level of review involved in these documents. Since the practice of interior design is not being altered, then specific practices such as stamping or sealing documents do not need to be altered.