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Vote NO on Building Designer Licensing

BACKGROUND

In the building industry, architects have the responsibility to ensure that buildings are safely designed. Now a new group calling themselves “building designers” would like to practice architecture, but without any of the education, training or testing required of state licensed architects. State law recognizes the significant threat to the public health, safety and welfare from the unlicensed practice of architecture. Creating an additional license for building designers is not only unnecessary, it would put the public at great risk by allowing unqualified persons to practice architecture.

BUILDING DESIGNERS PROPOSAL

Building designers are introducing a bill to allow them to practice architecture of unlimited scale without an architect. They want to design high rise condominiums and other multiunit residential buildings of unlimited size, commercial projects of unlimited size (provided they work with a contractor), and other commercial projects of up to 45,000 square feet without any specialized education, training or testing. They would allow anyone to practice such building design with as little as 2 years of experience, no formal training and no testing.

PUBLIC SAFETY IS PROTECTED BY ARCHITECT REGISTRATION

Architects have unique education, training and testing to determine their competence to protect the public life and safety in the design of buildings for human use and habitation. Architects are also trained to coordinate the work of other professionals to ensure that the designs of consulting engineers, specialty engineers and the input of contractors are integrated appropriately into the final building design.

In order to protect the public health, safety and welfare, Washington State requires those who practice architecture to meet rigorous requirements of education, training and examination prior to becoming licensed.

A registered architect must typically complete 5 to 7 years of education, complete a 3 year structured internship program under the direct supervision of an architect and pass a comprehensive national examination.

The architect law also recognizes that some persons may obtain qualifications to practice architecture through practical experience. In these cases the law allows persons to sit for the national examination if they have “8 years’ practical architectural work experience, which may include designing buildings as a principal activity, and have completed the requirements of a structured intern training program approved by the board.” RCW 18.08.350(3)(b). The structured internship ensures that applicants are trained in the public safety aspects of architecture by a practicing, registered architect.

ARCHITECT LAW INCLUDES REASONABLE EXEMPTIONS

The law (18.08 RCW) includes appropriate exemptions from the registration requirements that recognize the lesser threats to public safety in the design of single family residential, multiunit residential of 4 or fewer units, farm and small commercial (4,000 gross square feet or less) buildings. It also recognizes that other professions, such as engineers, may practice some similar services that are authorized by their own registration law.

The AIA/WA urges legislators to oppose any bill licensing building designers. Architecture should be practiced by architects and not unqualified individuals who have no specific education, training or testing in public safety protection.

AIA/WA also urges legislators to not expand the current exemptions in the architecture law. The law exists to protect public safety and it already includes reasonable exemptions that protect public safety while allowing others to continue to operate profitable businesses.