



AIA Washington Council

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Issue Brief

Modernization of the Architecture Laws Support Substitute SB 6757

Background

The State of Washington restricts the practice of architecture to licensed individuals and businesses in order to protect the public health, safety and welfare. The law establishes rigorous qualifications standards for persons to become licensed architects. It also requires certain businesses that provide architecture services to register with the state. The architecture licensing law was last changed in 1985. New technologies and modern practice methods, such as sustainability, have significantly changed the practice of architecture in the past two decades.

The architecture law revisions are designed to align Washington's law with national architecture licensing standards. The bill updates the qualifications standards for initial and continuing licensure, streamline the corporate registration provisions and clean-up confusing and conflicting exemptions.

Updating Qualifications Standards

In the last two decades buildings have become more complex and technology more complicated. The changes being proposed for initial licensure recognize that modern architecture requires more rigorous education and training than it did decades ago.

The bill retains the basic requirements to pass the national examination and complete a structured internship program. However, it updates the education and training standards for persons without an accredited degree.

The bill establishes a three tier system for persons to qualify to take the national examination. First, graduates from an accredited architecture program (which typically takes five to seven years) must have three years of training in a structured internship program. Applicants with a baccalaureate degree in any field need eight years of training, four of which must be under a licensed architect. Applicants with a high school diploma need fifteen years of training, including eight years under a licensed architect.

In addition, the bill adds continuing professional development requirements for continuing licensure. Architects will need 12 annual contact hours or 24 hours during their two-year license term.

Streamlining Corporate Registration

The current statutes on corporate registration are confusing and exempt some businesses from having to register with the licensing board. The new standard would require that any business offering architecture services in Washington State must register with the board and identify the Washington licensed architects and their roles in the business. This simpler standard will make it easier for businesses to comply with the law.

Cleaning Up the Exemptions

There are three challenges with the wording of the current exemptions. First, they appear to allow persons to practice architecture without a license, provided an engineer reviews and stamps their drawings. This language would seem to indicate that the architecture licensing board has some authority to regulate the practice of engineering. Engineers are independently licensed and authorized to provide services under their own law. It is inappropriate for the architecture law to appear to regulate them. Therefore, a simple blanket exemption is retained in the law for engineers and other licensed professionals and other references to engineers are removed.

Second, the practical definitions of terms in the statute have changed in the last two decades. The bill updates the exemption for design-build to clarify that it applies only to architectural services. It states that a contractor may continue to offer design-build services, provided the architecture services are performed by a licensed architect.

Third, there are duplicative exemptions that have caused confusion with building officials and regulators. The duplicative and confusing exemptions are removed or clarified.