



Testimony of

**Sal Luciano, President  
Connecticut AFL-CIO**

General Law Committee  
February 23, 2021

***HB 6445 An Act Expanding Economic Opportunity in  
Occupations Licensed by the Department of Consumer Protection***

Good afternoon Senator Maroney, Representative D'Agostino and members of the General Law Committee. My name is Sal Luciano and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 220,000 workers in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to the Governor's bill, HB 6445, which would dilute occupational licensing standards thereby compromising public safety, consumer protection and worker health and safety.

We are dismayed that Governor Lamont would participate in the billionaire Koch network's legal, legislative and public relations crusade against occupational licensure. To the Koch network and their conservative allies, occupational licensing standards are as offensive as labor unions. They don't much care for public policies that protect the health, safety and wellbeing of workers, fearing they cut too deeply into their profit margins. They have spent millions of dollars producing ideologically driven "academic studies" and use their state level spin networks to make licensing standards a political issue, just like wearing a face mask during a global pandemic.

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), with its own deep connections to the Koch network, has been a willing accomplice. ALEC has written a model bill for legislators to copy and paste in state capitols around the country. Their "Model Interstate-Mobility & Universal-Recognition Occupational Licensing Act" has recently passed wholly or in part in a handful of states, including Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Missouri, Montana and Iowa. Now you have it before you in HB 6445. Section 1 of HB 6445 is from section 110.02 of ALEC's model bill.<sup>1</sup>

Nefarious origins aside, this bill undermines robust occupational licensing, which is a key mechanism to ensure that professionals are highly educated, trained and experienced. It is the most effective way that Connecticut consumers can have confidence in the quality of services they provide. Teachers, nurses, electricians, plumbers, social workers and countless other professions are impacted by the licensing system. It influences wages, consumer prices, employment and mobility for workers who want to take their skills across state lines. It is essential that licensing systems be sensible and strike the right balance between protecting consumers and promoting economic growth and employment opportunity.

This bill lowers the bar for workers from out-of-state. Without knowing the quality of education, types of training, years of experience or other licensing requirements in other states, it allows out-of-state workers to receive a Connecticut license by just passing a test. But that's not all. Lines 42-52 are particularly troubling. They would allow a person who was never licensed in another state to receive a Connecticut license if the Department of Consumer Protection is satisfied that he or she has completed three or more years' of "substantially similar" work experience. The bill does not explain how the Department will objectively determine if the work experience is "substantially similar."

Why would any prospective licensed professional go to the trouble of completing highly regarded Connecticut training and apprenticeship programs, when they can get a license in another state with less effort and then come back to Connecticut and have reciprocal recognition? This is a dereliction of duty on the part of state regulators.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alec.org/model-policy/model-interstate-mobility-and-universal-recognition-occupational-licensing-act-the-freedom-to-travel-and-work-act/>

While we understand the intent of this legislation is to streamline licensing in professional occupations and facilitate license reciprocity between states, we should be careful about making changes to standards without significant discussion and input from all vested stakeholders. That did not occur. Further, reciprocity should be reserved for states with preparation standards similar to those in Connecticut.

With unemployment as high as 30% in our licensed construction trades, finding appropriately licensed professionals is not the problem. We are losing our licensed professionals to Massachusetts and New York where they are more likely to find work. We suggest that Governor Lamont could do more to create jobs and drive economic growth if his proposed budget invested significantly in infrastructure so that licensed tradespeople could make a living in their home state of Connecticut.

This is poorly conceived legislation, and we urge the Committee to reject this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.