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RED TAPE

Edit: General Assembly should heed JLARC recommendations

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We were pleased to learn of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's findings and recommendations to state lawmakers last week following its investigation of the Department of Professional and Occupation Regulation. According to the report, DPOR is regulating too many occupations (it licenses 45 different professions) and failing to verify self-reported information submitted by many licensees.

The report states that five occupation groups account for almost 90 percent of DPOR's licenses: personal care occupations, such as cosmetologists and barbers; tradesmen, such as electricians and plumbers; real estate professionals; contractors; and professional engineers and architects.

The JLARC report concludes that 11 occupations shouldn't even need licenses because they don't meet state criteria for requiring regulation. Several of the occupations pose no danger to the public,

and state licensing requirements for others only duplicate national certifications. As noted in an RTD news story Friday, JLARC's staff found that the General Assembly has often increased regulations without evaluating whether they are even necessary. The commission recommended deregulating several professions, including residential energy analysts, opticians, and community managers.

We applaud the findings. The Times-Dispatch has long been a proponent of less occupational licensing. We believe excessive regulations have played a role in the state's sluggish economic recovery and hindered the ability of people to improve their standards of living. Half a century ago, only one job out of 20 required some type of government certification. Today that number is about one in four. Even the Obama administration, which was about the most regulation-friendly administration in recent history, noted that excessive licensing can "artificially create higher costs for consumers and prohibit skilled American workers like florists or hairdressers from entering jobs in which they could otherwise excel. . . In addition, the patchwork of state-by-state licensing rules leads to dramatically different requirements for the same occupations depending on the state in which one lives, burdening workers who aim to move across state lines."

If all occupational licenses truly protected consumer health and safety, we wouldn't question their necessity. But much of the licensing that has proliferated in recent years has little connection to public safety. Often it has been imposed merely as means to stifle competition. The commonwealth ranks as one of the most burdensome states in the country for occupational licensing. We encourage the General Assembly to act on JLARC's recommendations.