

## Occupational Licensing Reform Sustainability Group (OLRSG)

### Minutes of Meeting

**August 11, 2020 – 1:30 P.M. Meeting – Big Mac Building – Room B – Little Rock AR 72201**

**Members Present:** Sen. John Cooper, Co-Chair; Rep. Bruce Cozart, Co-Chair; Mr. Daryl Bassett; Sen. Ricky Hill; Rep. Michelle Gray; Dr. Charisse Childers; Rep. Roger Lynch; Ms. Connie Melton; Mr. Brad Nye; Mr. Steven Porch; Ms. Karen Whatley; Mr. Gary Isom

**Members Absent:** Sen. Keith Ingram

Dr. Charisse Childers, Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS), had to leave after opening introductions and Mr. Jay Bassett remained in her seat.

#### Opening of meeting

Co-Chair, Sen. John Cooper opened the meeting, welcomed everybody, thanked them for the hard work that had been done in the past, and welcomed the new members. He stated he looked forward to a successful year.

Co-Chair, Rep. Bruce Cozart then also thanked the group and welcomed them, Rep. Cozart also introduced Rep. Richard McGrew from District 22 in Hot Springs. Mr. McGrew is a licensed electrician in the commercial industry and stated he wanted to be aware of what is going on with the group.

Each member of the group then one by one gave an introduction of themselves and a short welcome and thank you for being allowed to serve in the group.

Co-Chair, Sen. John Cooper mentioned that 80 bills were presented and about 40 were passed in the state legislature last session which the committee helped bring forward. Some other states were still working on bills, so remarkable accomplishments were made.

Mr. Gary Isom, retired Arkansas Real Estate Commission, gave an overview / update on the other successes of the committee previously. He stated that the group started in 2017 with a grant from the US Department of Labor (US DOL) of 7.5 million dollars and then added another \$7.5 million in 2018 to study occupational licensing and regulation. Arkansas applied and was accepted into the consortium as 1 of the 11 original states; there are now a total of 15 states involved in the consortium. He then proceeded to update details on the goals and tasks completed from the original group and the 87 boards and commissions that are affected by the processes. Mr. Isom also stated that there is a website that retains all information / reports so at any time documents / information can be reviewed by visiting [occupationallicensingArkansas.blog](http://occupationallicensingArkansas.blog).

Mr. Greg Crow, Department of Labor & Licensing Contractor's Licensing Board Director, gave an update of the Occupational Licensing Advisory Group (OLAG). OLAG started meeting in January again, but COVID changed the meeting dynamics. First thing on their agenda was to create four subcommittees:

1. A group to look at working with immigrants with work authorizations
2. A group to look at working with low income dislocated workers
3. A group to create a central collection – user friendly website
4. A group to look at major accomplishments from the 2019 session and if any updates need to be made to those.

The group also worked on a survey that went out to the agencies around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The information was due the next week after the August 11, 2020, OLRSG meeting. Dr. Slagle will compiling the results for review.

Governor Asa Hutchinson then arrived to address the group. He was welcomed by the members and then he preceded to thank the team for their work. Governor Hutchinson stated that he was reflecting on when the group started and how their efforts have been one of the most successful efforts in passing legislation, making a difference in the lives of individuals across Arkansas that want to work and reform efforts. He noted that he knew that the team was successful in passing 83 licensure bills to be introduced and 45 of those passed in the 2019 session. He noted that was significant reform. Governor Hutchinson also stated how the pandemic created ways for them to think on how to speed licensures up and get people in the work force quicker in nursing fields, and that if it could be done in a pandemic, how could we make it possible to have those processes function every day and ease the burden on the citizens. He stated that he would like to see another round of bills proposed but said that this step cannot be taken across the board because we also have to protect the public welfare of the state and make sure the contractors are appropriately licensed and have a bond so that they can get a recourse and that our medical professions have proper training. Those are legitimate public concerns, and we need to be able to balance those two which is what legislators do best. He wants to throw out a challenge that we look at our licensure fees; what if we, across the board, reduce the fee by 15 or 20 %? Let's study what we can do across the board. That is something this committee can look at. He recognizes the challenges since the fees pay for many things. He then thanked the committee and took any questions..

Representative Cozart stated to the Governor that he believed last time one of their suggestions was to work on the fees. Some already have lessened their fees, but they still had a ways to go. He thanked the Governor because now they can move forward knowing that he also wanted to go this route.

Mr. Greg Crow & Mr. Gary Isom came back to the table so that Mr. Crow could finish his update to the group. He stated that he would add a 5<sup>th</sup> topic to their team's discussion on fees after the Governor's remarks, and they will add those to the survey that is out. He would like to have a report for the group by early October.

Mr. Isom gave an overview on the bills that were passed during the last legislative session, what they did, and who they affected by group.

Dr. Derrick Slagle asked to be recognized and stated that yes, fees need to be addressed but also the costs to get the occupational credential. Studies showed that the fees are generally the highest for the lowest paid jobs. The books created by the state do not show all fees listed outside of the agency and / or national charges / 3<sup>rd</sup> party charges. Do the fees outweigh the benefit of the service?

Senator Cooper then gave some closing remarks and stated that the next meeting date will be sent by email as soon as a date is confirmed for a meeting room.