

# Licensing Reform Task Force

## Construction Subcommittee

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### Memorandum

**To:** Construction Subcommittee

**Date:** June 22, 2026

**Re:** Proposed Legislation Revising Montana Plumbing and Board of Plumbers Laws

#### Purpose of the Bill

The proposed legislation updates Montana’s plumbing licensing statutes and the laws governing the Board of Plumbers. In plain terms, the bill is intended to modernize and clarify who must be licensed, what experience qualifies a person for licensure, what proof of licensure or registration must be shown on a job site, and how medical gas piping work is regulated. It also removes several older or redundant code sections and consolidates key requirements into the remaining statutes.

#### Major Changes

First, the bill rewrites and updates the definitions used in the plumbing licensing chapter. It defines the “field of plumbing,” “plumbing system,” “drainage system,” “journeyman plumber,” “master plumber,” and “legally obtained practical experience.” These definitions matter because they set the boundaries for what work is regulated and what type of experience can be counted toward licensure.

Second, the bill clarifies exceptions from plumbing licensure and narrows or removes certain exception-related language. The bill keeps itemized exceptions for work by owners of single-family residences for personal use, mobile or manufactured home dealer connections made as part of delivery and setup, work in mines, mills, smelters, refineries, or railroads, certain farm and ranch work, certain water and sewer main work by local governments or districts, minor appliance-dealer work, water meter installation by a qualified person appointed by the water system, certain private water supply work, supervised apprentice work, and limited classroom or laboratory work by students in recognized plumbing training programs.

The revised itemized list does not include “public utilities” as a standalone licensure exception, although a separate subsection still says the chapter may not be construed to apply to or affect plumbing installations in “public utilities.” The draft also repeals section 37-69-103, MCA, titled “No penalty for hiring unlicensed plumber,” which removes that separate exception-related statutory provision from the plumbing chapter. The student exception is limited: it does not allow students to perform plumbing work that will be incorporated into or used in an occupied structure or connected to a plumbing system where a licensed plumber is required.

Third, the bill revises the qualifications for a journeyman plumber license. It keeps the general four-year, 8,000-hour experience standard, but makes clear that the experience may be satisfied either through an approved apprenticeship program or through lawful, documented practical experience in plumbing work. It also gives the Board authority to determine by rule how related instruction, trade school, incomplete apprenticeship experience, and lawful out-of-state experience may be counted.

Fourth, the bill clarifies the qualifications and restrictions for master plumbers. A master plumber applicant must show four years and at least 6,000 hours of experience as a licensed journeyman plumber or an equivalent as

defined by rule and must pass the required master plumber examination. The bill also states that a master plumber may not allow another person or business to use the master plumber's license to obtain permits or perform plumbing work.

Fifth, the bill updates proof-of-licensure requirements on job sites. A licensed plumber must carry either the license or acceptable proof of licensure while doing work that requires a license. The bill also identifies who may ask for proof of licensure on a job site, including a building code compliance inspector, a Department employee, a person professionally responsible for the job site, or another licensed plumber working on the same job site. If proof is not provided, the matter may be reported to the Board or the Department, and a Department employee may issue a citation and collect a fine when a person fails to display proof of licensure at the request of a Department inspector.

Sixth, the bill strengthens accountability for licensed plumbers and master plumbers. The Board may discipline licensees or medical gas endorsees for plumbing work below Uniform Plumbing Code standards, inadequate supervision that causes or allows substandard work, or willful or repeated violations of the plumbing laws or related building-code provisions. The bill also states that a licensed master plumber is responsible for ensuring that work performed by employed journeyman plumbers or apprentices complies with the state plumbing code and may face unprofessional-conduct charges for giving false information to the Department about a journeyman plumber's or apprentice's experience or skill.

Seventh, the bill revises medical gas piping provisions. It prohibits an individual from installing pipe used solely to transport medical gases unless the individual holds a valid medical gas piping installation registration, allows a person with a valid medical gas piping installation endorsement from another state to install medical gas piping in Montana, and directs the Board to establish registration requirements by rule. The bill also updates proof-of-registration requirements during inspections and on job sites.

Finally, the bill repeals several sections of existing law that appear to be redundant or moved into other provisions. The repealed sections include provisions on board presiding officers and compensation, application contents, examination and license issuance, fee and fine deposits, failure to display a license, retirement status, and requirements for medical gas piping installation.

## **How the Bill Affects DLI, the Board, and Construction Stakeholders**

The bill directly affects the Board of Plumbers and the Department's licensing, compliance, inspection, and enforcement functions. The Board would need to rely on rulemaking to implement several parts of the bill, including acceptable proof of licensure, treatment of related instruction and out-of-state experience, and medical gas piping registration requirements. The Department would also need to update licensing guidance, forms, website information, and communications to licensees, apprentices, training programs, inspectors, and construction stakeholders.

For the construction industry, the bill's most practical effects are clearer licensure pathways, clearer job-site proof requirements, clearer supervision responsibilities, and clearer limits on when unlicensed persons, students, apprentices, or exempt individuals may perform plumbing work. The bill also reinforces that master plumbers remain accountable for work performed under their employment and may not lend their licenses to others for permits or plumbing work.

## **Requested Action**

DLI asks the Construction Subcommittee to review the proposed legislation and prepare a recommendation that the Full Task Force support the bill. The recommendation should focus on the bill's practical value to the construction industry and the public: clearer plumbing licensure standards, more transparent job-site proof requirements, stronger accountability for supervision and code compliance, and updated treatment of medical gas piping work.