



Licensing Reform Task Force

CONSTRUCTION SUBCOMMITTEE - RECOMMENDATION

SUPPORT FOR BOARD OF PLUMBING LEGISLATION

Recommended Task Force Action

The **Construction Subcommittee** recommends that the full Licensing Reform Task Force support the Board of Plumbing's proposed legislation for consideration during the 2027 Montana Legislative session.

the proposed legislation modernizes and clarifies the Plumbing Practice Act while preserving the Board's authority to protect public health and safety. In particular, it would:

- define and standardize the practical experience that may qualify an applicant for journeyman plumber licensure;
- replace an unclear five-year experience standard with a four-year, 8,000-hour documented-experience pathway that identifies qualifying plumbing work and acceptable verification records;
- align apprenticeship requirements with an approved 8,000-hour registered apprenticeship or a substantially equivalent program;
- authorize the Board, by rule, to evaluate related instruction, incomplete apprenticeship training, and out-of-state experience when determining whether experience is substantially equivalent;
- clarify the experience required for master plumber licensure, including equivalent experience from jurisdictions that use different licensing terminology;
- convert medical gas piping credentialing from a separate state endorsement to a registration based on national certification;
- conform plumbing job-site proof-of-license provisions to the approach used for electrical licensing;
- remove duplicate provisions that are already governed by the general professional-licensing statutes, including the general unprofessional-conduct standards in 37-1-316, MCA; and
- make related technical, organizational, and cross-reference corrections, including revisions to exemptions and permit provisions.

The proposed legislation directly addresses issues identified by the Construction Subcommittee and public commenters concerning the transparency, portability, and verification of plumbing experience. Current law requires a journeyman applicant to show five years of legally obtained plumbing experience and permits satisfaction of that standard through work in a "major phase" of plumbing or completion of a qualifying apprenticeship (37-69-304, MCA). The proposed bill supplies clearer standards for applicants and the Board by defining qualifying experience, identifying the documentation used to verify that experience, and aligning the experience measure with the 8,000-hour model used in registered apprenticeship programs.

Executive Order No. 1-2026 Report Elements Addressed

This recommendation addresses the following elements required for the Task Force's initial report under Executive Order No. 1-2026:

- **Public health, safety, or welfare hazard.** Plumbing work implicates potable water, sanitary systems, fuel gas, and medical gas systems. The recommendation maintains licensure safeguards while clarifying the experience and credential-verification standards used to establish competency.
- **Public benefit provided by licensure.** The proposal strengthens the administrability and consistency of plumber licensure requirements by identifying qualifying work, setting documentation standards, and retaining Board oversight of equivalency determinations.
- **Specialized skill or training with nationally recognized standards.** The proposal aligns apprenticeship requirements with an 8,000-hour approved apprenticeship or substantially equivalent program and recognizes national medical gas piping certification through a state registration process.
- **Justification for licensure qualifications.** The revised experience framework is more specific and objectively verifiable than the existing reference to work in a "major phase" of plumbing, while continuing to require demonstrated experience and examination before licensure.
- **Unnecessary barriers to entry.** The recommendation reduces avoidable uncertainty by expressly recognizing documented lawful experience, related instruction, qualifying apprenticeship training, and substantially equivalent out-of-state experience. It also replaces duplicative statutory provisions with generally applicable Title 37 standards where appropriate.
- **Workforce shortages or access constraints in rural and frontier communities.** Clearer pathways for applicants with registered apprenticeship, military, federal, tribal, or out-of-state experience may expand the pool of qualified plumbers without reducing competency standards, which may improve access to plumbing services in rural and frontier areas.
- **Licensure portability, reciprocity, or endorsement pathways.** The proposal authorized Board rulemaking on the treatment of substantially equivalent out-of-state education, training, and experience and recognizes medical gas credentials through registration rather than a separate state endorsement.
- **Public support for continued licensure.** The recommendation supports continued plumbing licensure as a public-safety measure while tailoring the requirements to documented competency and avoiding redundant regulation.
- **Proposed legislation for the 2027 Montana Legislative Session.** The Board's proposal is an appropriate legislative recommendation for inclusion in the Task Force's 2027 package, subject to final agency, executive, and legislative review.

Policy Assessment

Benefits

The legislation advances a competency-based and evidence-supported licensing framework. It provides applicants with clearer notice of the experience required for licensure and the records needed to establish that experience. It also gives the Board more workable tools to evaluate non-traditional but lawful training and experience, including substantially equivalent experience obtained outside of Montana.

The medical gas registration provision reduces a duplicative state credentialing step when an applicant already holds the applicable national certification, while preserving a Montana record of individuals authorized to perform this specialized work. The consolidation of duplication conduct provisions also promotes consistency with the uniform licensing and discipline provisions in Title 37, including 37-1-316, MCA.

Considerations for Final Bill Development

Staff and the Board should confirm that final bill language:

- clearly defines "legally obtained practical experience" and applies that definition consistently throughout the Plumbing Practice Act;
- specifies sufficient documentation standards while allowing the Board reasonable flexibility by rule to address atypical but reliable records;

- preserves a practical pathway for qualified applicants whose experience was obtained through federal, military, tribal, or out-of-state employment;
- establishes a clear transition for applicants who began an apprenticeship or accumulated experience under the prior statutory requirements;
- confirms that the medical gas registration process verifies current national certification without creating unnecessary state-specific requirements; and
- identifies any fiscal, rulemaking, information-technology, or implementation needs before introduction.

Motion

The Construction Subcommittee moves that the Licensing Reform Task Force support the Board of Plumbing's proposed legislation for the 2027 Montana Legislative Session and direct staff to continue final bill development with the Board of Plumbing and Department of Labor and Industry staff. Staff should present final legislative language, implementation considerations, and any necessary fiscal or rulemaking analysis for review through the agency legislative process.