



Licensing Reform Task Force

CONSTRUCTION SUBCOMMITTEE - RECOMMENDATION

SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL CERTIFICATIONS, RURAL ACCESS, ONLINE ADMINISTRATION, AND RENEWAL-CYCLE CONSOLIDATION

Recommended Task Force Action

The **Construction Subcommittee** recommends that the full Licensing Reform Task Force direct the Department of Labor and Industry and the affected licensing boards and programs to evaluate and, where feasible and consistent with public health and safety, implement the following administrative and policy reforms for construction-related credentials:

- recognize a qualifying national certification in place of duplicative state-specific technical examination or credential requirements when the Department or governing board determines that the national credential is substantially equivalent to Montana's competency requirements;
- retain an appropriate Montana registration, license, or other compliance mechanism when needed to verify the national credential, administer Montana-specific safety requirements, support enforcement, or fund program administration;
- maximize accessible online administration, including online applications, electronic document submission, remote or vendor-based examination options, online continuing education when appropriate, and plain-language licensing checklists;
- preserve non-digital access and regional assistance for applicants who lack reliable technology or broadband access, including use of available Job Service locations or other suitable locations for application assistance and in-person testing; and
- align renewal dates and reduce duplicative filings for related credentials when administratively feasible, including through a single renewal application or a single insurance or workers' compensation filing that can be used for multiple related credentials.

This recommendation does not direct the elimination of a state credential solely because a national certification exists. Instead, it establishes a measured review framework: a national credential should be accepted only after the responsible board or program verifies substantial equivalence, evaluates the continuing need for Montana-specific oversight, and identifies a practicable mechanism for public-facing compliance and enforcement.

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.** The recommendation preserves a case-specific review of competency and the need for Montana compliance oversight before state requirements are reduced or consolidated.
- **Public benefit provided by licensure.** It distinguishes between the competency function served by a nationally recognized credential and the separate state functions of verification, accountability, enforcement, and public information.
- **Specialized skill or training with nationally recognized standards.** The recommendation directs boards and programs to assess whether recognized national credentials demonstrate qualifications substantially equivalent to Montana standards before accepting those credentials in lieu of duplicative state-specific requirements.
- **Justification for licensure qualifications and unnecessary barriers to entry.** National credentials, online processes, remote or vendor-based testing, and consolidated renewal activity may reduce unnecessary costs, travel, delay, and duplicate paperwork while preserving qualifications necessary to protect the public.
- **Cost of service to the public.** Reducing duplicative technical examinations, unnecessary trips to testing locations, and repeated filings may lower administrative costs for licensees and, in turn, reduce cost pressures that can affect consumers.
- **Workforce shortages or access constraints in rural and frontier communities.** Online administration, regional testing, electronic document submission, and accessible alternatives for applicants without reliable technology can make credentialing more attainable for rural and frontier residents.
- **Licensure portability, reciprocity, or endorsement pathways.** Recognition of substantially equivalent national credentials can create a more predictable pathway for qualified workers who enter Montana from other jurisdictions while retaining appropriate Montana oversight.
- **Public support for continued licensure.** The recommendation preserves licensure or registration where it provides meaningful public-protection function, while reducing administrative features that do not independently establish competency or protect the public.
- **Proposed legislation for the 2027 Montana Legislative Session.** Staff should identify reforms that can be implemented under existing authority and identify any statutory changes necessary to authorize consolidated renewals, shared filings, or revised credential structures.

Policy Assessment

Benefits

A deliberate national-certification review can prevent duplication when a credential already tests the knowledge and skills Montana requires. It can also improve workforce mobility and reduce applicant expense. At the same time, a registration or comparable state mechanism may remain appropriate when the Department needs to verify credential status, apply Montana-specific requirements, receive complaints, conduct compliance activity, or maintain a current public record.

Expanded online administration and regional support can reduce travel and scheduling burdens for Montanans outside major population centers. The recommendation recognizes, however, that a fully online system may itself be a barrier for applicants without dependable internet access, computer access, or digital literacy. Online modernization therefore should be paired with an accessible in-person or assisted alternative.

Renewal-cycle alignment and consolidated filings can reduce repeated data entry and administrative contacts for licensee who hold related credentials. Such consolidation should simplify the process without obscuring the individual requirements, fees, expiration periods, or enforcement responsibilities that apply to each credential.

Limitations and Safeguards

National certifications differ in scope, examination content, renewal requirements, disciplinary processes, and cost. The Department and relevant boards should not recognize a credential automatically or require membership in a single private credentialing organization without an equivalency assessment and attention to applicant cost. The review should also confirm that any credentialing organization relied on by the State has reliable verification, meaningful standards, and a process for addressing discipline or loss of certification.

Online delivery, remote testing, and electronic document systems require technology investment, vendor capacity, cybersecurity safeguards, and staff time. Implementation should be prioritized within available appropriations and information-technology capacity. The recommendation does not require an immediate statewide conversion to online-only services.

Implementation and Staff Analysis

Staff should report to the Task Force on the following:

- construction-related credentials for which a national certification may already be substantially equivalent to Montana requirements;
- the public-safety, compliance, inspection, and fiscal functions served by any state license or registration proposed for modification;
- whether recognition of a national credential can be implemented by board rule, Department procedure, or existing statute, and any legislation needed for implementation;
- online application, document-upload, testing, continuing-education, and plain-language checklist improvements that can be prioritized within existing resources;
- methods to maintain assisted, regional, or in-person access for applicants who cannot reasonably use online systems; and
- related credentials with duplicative or misaligned renewal dates, applications, insurance attestations, or workers' compensation filings, together with recommended options for consolidation.

Motion

The Construction Subcommittee moves that the Licensing Reform Task Force advance this recommendation for staff analysis and phased implementation. Staff should work with the affected licensing boards and programs to identify reforms that may be implemented under existing law, develop any needed rule or legislative proposals for the 2027 Montana Legislative Session, and return with an implementation plan that preserves public safety, avoids unnecessary barriers to entry, and maintains accessible services for rural and frontier Montanans..