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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R.

To help States combat abuse of occupational licensing laws by economic incumbents, to promote competition, to encourage innovation, to protect consumers, and to facilitate the restoration of antitrust immunity to State occupational boards, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. ISSA introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee
on _____

A BILL

To help States combat abuse of occupational licensing laws by economic incumbents, to promote competition, to encourage innovation, to protect consumers, and to facilitate the restoration of antitrust immunity to State occupational boards, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Restoring Board Im-
5 munity Act of 2021” or the “RBI Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. STATEMENT OF FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) The prevalence of occupational licensing has
4 increased dramatically in recent decades, in part be-
5 cause private interests have sought licensing in order
6 to limit competition.

7 (2) Occupational licensing often limits opportu-
8 nities for workers, frustrates entrepreneurs seeking
9 to introduce new business models, and raises prices
10 paid by consumers.

11 (3) Licensing should be imposed only to combat
12 real, substantial threats to public health, safety, or
13 welfare and only where other less restrictive regu-
14 latory alternatives are insufficient to protect con-
15 sumers and serve the public interest.

16 (4) Regulators should consider a range of less
17 restrictive alternatives before enacting an occupa-
18 tional licensing regime, which may include inspec-
19 tions, bonding or insurance requirements, registra-
20 tion, and voluntary certification.

21 (5) Voluntary certification provides a particu-
22 larly significant alternative to licensure, as it allows
23 market participants to signal to consumers the at-
24 tainment of personal qualifications without limiting
25 entry into the marketplace.

1 (6) The failure of State governments to adopt
2 less restrictive alternatives to licensing, and less bur-
3 densome requirements in those areas where licensing
4 is deemed necessary, has resulted in significant costs
5 to consumers and the broader economy.

6 (7) The United States Supreme Court re-
7 sponded to these concerns in *North Carolina Board*
8 *of Dental Examiners v. FTC*, 135 S. Ct. 1101
9 (2015), holding that self-interested licensing boards
10 may be subject to liability under the antitrust laws,
11 but that decision has also created significant uncer-
12 tainty for the States and their licensing boards.

13 (8) Some States have responded to the decision
14 in *North Carolina Board of Dental Examiners* by es-
15 tablishing a layer of bureaucratic oversight that
16 merely monitors board actions for consistency with
17 State licensing laws. This response is a missed op-
18 portunity for reform, as it does not address the spe-
19 cific competition concern raised in *North Carolina*
20 *Board of Dental Examiners* or the underlying prob-
21 lems with over-reliance on occupational licensure as
22 a regulatory approach and with overly broad enforce-
23 ment of licensing laws as a means to regulate com-
24 mercial activities outside an occupation's scope of
25 practice.

1 (9) Legislation is necessary to clarify the re-
2 quirements of active supervision, both to offer States
3 a clear and certain mechanism to immunize their oc-
4 cupational boards and to make clear that mere bu-
5 reaucratic oversight to ensure consistency with State
6 licensing laws does not suffice to confer immunity.

7 (10) This Act is intended to offer States a
8 choice between two alternative routes to achieve im-
9 munity for their occupational licensing boards—ei-
10 ther establishing a mechanism for meaningful active
11 supervision of licensing boards by State officials or
12 establishing a mechanism for meaningful judicial re-
13 view of board actions in the State courts.

14 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

15 In this Act:

16 (1) CERTIFICATION.—The term “certification”
17 means a voluntary program under which—

18 (A) a private organization (in the case of
19 private certification) or the government of a
20 State (in the case of government certification)
21 authorizes an individual who meets certain per-
22 sonal qualifications to use “certified” as a des-
23 ignated title with respect to the performance of
24 a lawful occupation; and

1 (B) a non-certified individual may perform
2 the lawful occupation for compensation but may
3 not use the title “certified”.

4 (2) GOOD FAITH.—The term “good faith”, with
5 respect to performance—

6 (A) means diligent performance that is di-
7 rected towards achieving the policies set forth
8 in this Act;

9 (B) does not include performance that is—

10 (i) designed to subvert or evade the
11 policies set forth in this Act; or

12 (ii) carried out in a manner that has
13 the systematic effect of subverting or evad-
14 ing the policies set forth in this Act; and

15 (C) refers to an objective, rather than sub-
16 jective, standard.

17 (3) LAWFUL OCCUPATION.—The term “lawful
18 occupation” means a course of conduct, pursuit, or
19 profession that includes the sale of goods or services
20 that are not themselves illegal to sell irrespective of
21 whether the individual selling the goods or services
22 is subject to occupational licensing laws.

23 (4) LEAST RESTRICTIVE REGULATION.—The
24 term “least restrictive regulation” means, from least
25 to most restrictive:

1 (A) One or more of the following, each of
2 which shall be considered equally restrictive:

3 (i) Market competition.

4 (ii) Industry or consumer-related rat-
5 ings and reviews.

6 (iii) Private certification.

7 (iv) A specific private civil cause of
8 action to remedy consumer harm.

9 (v) A deceptive trade practice act.

10 (vi) A regulation of the process of
11 providing the specific goods or services to
12 consumers.

13 (vii) Inspections.

14 (viii) Bonding or insurance.

15 (ix) Registration.

16 (x) Government certification.

17 (B) Specialty occupational license for med-
18 ical reimbursement.

19 (C) Occupational license.

20 (5) LESS RESTRICTIVE ALTERNATIVES TO OC-
21 CUPATIONAL LICENSING.—The term “less restrictive
22 alternatives to occupational licensing”—

23 (A) means regulations that achieve the
24 public health or safety goals asserted by the
25 government to justify licensing while imposing a

1 less onerous restriction on entry into the mar-
2 ketplace; and

3 (B) includes the alternative forms of regu-
4 lation described in paragraph (4)(A).

5 (6) MEMBER, OFFICER, OR EMPLOYEE.—The
6 term “member, officer, or employee”, with respect to
7 an occupational licensing board, means an individual
8 appointed by a State to the board.

9 (7) OCCUPATIONAL LICENSE.—The term “occu-
10 pational license” means a nontransferable authoriza-
11 tion under law for an individual to perform a lawful
12 occupation for compensation based on meeting per-
13 sonal qualifications established by the State govern-
14 ment.

15 (8) OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING BOARD.—The
16 term “occupational licensing board” or “board”
17 means an entity established under State law—

18 (A) the express purpose of which is to reg-
19 ulate the personal qualifications required to en-
20 gage in or practice a particular lawful occupa-
21 tion;

22 (B) that has authority conferred by State
23 law to interpret or enforce the occupational li-
24 censing laws of the State; and

1 (C) not less than $\frac{2}{3}$ of the members of
2 which are appointed by an elected official of the
3 State.

4 (9) OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING LAW.—The term
5 “occupational licensing law”—

6 (A) means a State statute that allows an
7 individual to work in a lawful occupation and
8 use an occupational title; and

9 (B) does not include a business license, fa-
10 cility license, building permit, or zoning and
11 land use regulation, except to the extent that
12 the law regulates an individual’s personal quali-
13 fications to engage in or practice a lawful occu-
14 pation.

15 (10) OCCUPATIONAL REGULATION.—The term
16 “occupational regulation”—

17 (A) means a statute, rule, practice, policy,
18 or other law that substantially burdens an indi-
19 vidual’s ability to work in a lawful occupation;

20 (B) includes a regulation requiring reg-
21 istration, certification, or an occupational li-
22 cense; and

23 (C) does not include a business license, fa-
24 cility license, building permit, or zoning and
25 land use regulation except to the extent that

1 such a requirement or restriction substantially
2 burdens an individual’s ability to work in a law-
3 ful occupation.

4 (11) PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS.—The term
5 “personal qualifications” means criteria related to
6 an individual’s personal background and characteris-
7 tics, including completion of an approved educational
8 program, satisfactory performance on an examina-
9 tion, work experience, other evidence of attainment
10 of requisite skills or knowledge, moral standing,
11 criminal history, and completion of continuing edu-
12 cation.

13 (12) REGISTRATION.—The term “registration”
14 means a requirement that an individual give notice
15 to the government of a State that may include—

16 (A) the individual’s name and address;

17 (B) the individual’s agent for service of
18 process;

19 (C) the location of the activity to be per-
20 formed; and

21 (D) a description of the service the indi-
22 vidual provides.

23 (13) SPECIALTY OCCUPATIONAL LICENSE FOR
24 MEDICAL REIMBURSEMENT.—The term “specialty
25 occupational license for medical reimbursement”

1 means a nontransferable authorization in law for an
2 individual to qualify for payment or reimbursement
3 from a government agency for the non-exclusive pro-
4 vision of medical services based on meeting personal
5 qualifications established by the State legislature.

6 (14) STATE.—The term “State” means—

7 (A) each of the several States; and

8 (B) the District of Columbia.

9 **SEC. 4. ANTITRUST IMMUNITY.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subsection (b), the
11 Sherman Act (15 U.S.C. 1 et seq.) shall not apply to any
12 action of an occupational licensing board of a State, or
13 any action of a member, officer, or employee of the board
14 acting in the official capacity of that member, officer, or
15 employee, if—

16 (1) the requirements under section 5 of this Act
17 are satisfied; or

18 (2) the requirements under section 6 of this Act
19 are satisfied.

20 (b) REQUIREMENT OF GOOD FAITH.—The immunity
21 provided under subsection (a) shall not apply to any action
22 of an occupational licensing board of a State, or any action
23 of a member, officer, or employee of the board acting in
24 the official capacity of that member, officer, or employee,

1 unless the State acts in good faith to perform the applica-
2 ble requirements under section 5 or 6.

3 (c) **EXISTING ENTITIES OR PROCEDURES.**—The fact
4 that a State governmental entity or procedure was estab-
5 lished before the date of enactment of this Act shall not
6 prevent an occupational licensing board of the State, or
7 a member, officer, or employee of that board, from quali-
8 fying for immunity under subsection (a) if the State gov-
9 ernmental entity or procedure satisfies the applicable re-
10 quirements under section 5 or 6.

11 (d) **SAVINGS CLAUSE.**—The immunity provided
12 under subsection (a) shall not apply to an action unrelated
13 to regulating the personal qualifications required to en-
14 gage in or practice a lawful occupation, such as rules of
15 an occupational licensing board governing minimum prices
16 or residency requirements.

17 **SEC. 5. ACTIVE SUPERVISION.**

18 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—The immunity under section 4(a)
19 shall apply to any action of an occupational licensing
20 board of a State, or any action of a member, officer, or
21 employee of that board acting in the official capacity of
22 that member, officer, or employee, if—

23 (1) the actions of the occupational licensing
24 board or member, officer, or employee are author-

1 ized by a non-frivolous interpretation of the occupa-
2 tional licensing laws of the State;

3 (2) the State adopts a policy of using less re-
4 strictive alternatives to occupational licensing to ad-
5 dress real, substantial threats to public health, safe-
6 ty, or welfare, in accordance with subsection (b) of
7 this section; and

8 (3) the State enacts legislation providing for ac-
9 tive supervision of the actions of an occupational li-
10 censing board and any member, officer, or employee
11 of such a board, in accordance with subsection (c)
12 of this section.

13 (b) POLICY.—The State shall adopt a policy pro-
14 viding that—

15 (1) occupational licensing laws should be con-
16 strued and applied to—

17 (A) protect public health, safety, and wel-
18 fare; and

19 (B) increase economic opportunity, pro-
20 mote competition, and encourage innovation;

21 (2) regulators should displace competition
22 through occupational licensing laws only if less re-
23 strictive alternatives to occupational licensing will
24 not suffice to protect consumers from real, substan-
25 tial threats to public health, safety, or welfare; and

1 (3) an occupational licensing law should be en-
2 forced against an individual only to the extent the
3 individual sells goods or services that are included
4 explicitly in the statute or regulation that defines
5 the occupation's scope of practice.

6 (c) ACTIVE SUPERVISION.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—The legislation enacted
8 under subsection (a)(3) shall satisfy each of the re-
9 quirements under this subsection.

10 (2) DAY-TO-DAY SUPERVISION.—

11 (A) ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICE OF SU-
12 PERVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL BOARDS.—The
13 State shall establish an Office of Supervision of
14 Occupational Boards (referred to in this sub-
15 section as the “Office”) to review the actions of
16 occupational licensing boards to ensure compli-
17 ance with the policy adopted under subsection
18 (b).

19 (B) DUTIES.—The Office shall—

20 (i) review and explicitly approve or re-
21 ject in writing any occupational regulation
22 proposed by a board before the board may
23 adopt or implement the occupational regu-
24 lation;

1 (ii) play a substantial role in the de-
2 velopment of a board's rules and policies to
3 ensure they benefit consumers and do not
4 serve the private interests of providers of
5 goods and services regulated by the board;

6 (iii) disapprove in writing the use of
7 any board rule or policy relating to an oc-
8 cupational regulation and terminate any
9 enforcement action, including any such ac-
10 tion pending on the date of enactment of
11 this Act, that is inconsistent with the pol-
12 icy adopted under subsection (b);

13 (iv) exercise control over each board
14 by reviewing and affirmatively approving in
15 writing only occupational regulations that
16 are consistent with the policy adopted
17 under subsection (b);

18 (v) use the analysis conducted under
19 paragraph (5) and conduct reasonable in-
20 vestigations to gain additional information,
21 including about less restrictive regulatory
22 approaches, to promote compliance with
23 subsection (b);

24 (vi)(I) be staffed by not less than 1
25 attorney; and

1 (II) prohibit attorneys working in the
2 Office from providing general counsel to
3 any board; and

4 (vii)(I) approve board actions explic-
5 itly in writing, rather than implicitly; and

6 (II) clearly establish that silence or
7 inaction does not constitute approval.

8 (3) INTERNAL REVIEW.—

9 (A) COMPLAINT.—The State shall estab-
10 lish a mechanism under which a person who is
11 a resident of or has a license to operate a busi-
12 ness in the State may file a complaint with the
13 Office about an occupational regulation of an
14 occupational licensing board in the State that
15 the person believes is inconsistent with the pol-
16 icy adopted under subsection (b).

17 (B) OFFICE RESPONSE.—Not later than
18 90 days after the date on which a person files
19 a complaint under subparagraph (A), the Office
20 shall—

21 (i) investigate the complaint;

22 (ii) identify remedies and instruct the
23 board to take action, where appropriate;
24 and

1 (iii) respond in writing to the com-
2 plainant.

3 (C) REVIEW.—The State shall establish a
4 mechanism for review of a determination made
5 by the Office under subparagraph (B), under
6 which a complainant may appeal the determina-
7 tion to the general division of the trial court of
8 the State if the challenged occupational regula-
9 tion would substantially burden the complain-
10 ant's ability to—

11 (i) engage in a lawful occupation; or
12 (ii) employ or contract other individ-
13 uals for the performance of a lawful occu-
14 pation.

15 (4) RIGHT TO RAISE DEFENSE.—

16 (A) IN GENERAL.—The State shall author-
17 ize an individual to assert as a defense, in any
18 administrative or judicial proceeding to enforce
19 an occupational regulation, that the regulation
20 does not comply with the policy adopted under
21 subsection (b).

22 (B) PROCEDURES.—In a proceeding de-
23 scribed in subparagraph (A)—

24 (i) an individual who asserts a defense
25 under this paragraph has the initial bur-

1 den of proof that the occupational regula-
2 tion being enforced substantially burdens
3 the individual's ability to engage in a law-
4 ful occupation;

5 (ii) if an individual meets the burden
6 of proof under clause (i), the State shall be
7 required to demonstrate by clear and con-
8 vincing evidence that the occupational reg-
9 ulation—

10 (I) advances an important gov-
11 ernment interest in protecting against
12 real, substantial threats to public
13 health, safety, or welfare; and

14 (II) is substantially related to
15 achievement of the important govern-
16 ment interest described in subclause
17 (I), in light of the availability of less
18 restrictive alternatives to occupational
19 licensing; and

20 (iii) in reviewing an alleged violation
21 of the policy adopted under subsection (b),
22 an administrative agency or a court—

23 (I) shall make its own findings of
24 fact and conclusions of law;

1 (II) may not rely on a legislative
2 finding of fact presented in admissible
3 form to the agency or court; and

4 (III) may not grant any pre-
5 sumption to a legislative determina-
6 tion—

7 (aa) of harm to public
8 health, safety, or welfare; or

9 (bb) that the occupational
10 regulation is substantially related
11 to achievement of the important
12 government interest described in
13 clause (ii)(I).

14 (5) PERIODIC ADVISORY REVIEW.—

15 (A) IN GENERAL.—The State shall estab-
16 lish a mechanism for periodic non-binding re-
17 view of existing occupational regulations, and
18 non-binding review of new proposed occupa-
19 tional regulations, to ensure that the occupa-
20 tional regulations comply with the policy adopt-
21 ed under subsection (b).

22 (B) SCOPE OF REVIEW.—The entity con-
23 ducting the review under subparagraph (A)—

24 (i) shall publish an annual written re-
25 port encompassing approximately 20 per-

1 cent of the occupations subject to occupa-
2 tional regulations within the State, such
3 that the entity will review all occupational
4 regulations within the State during each 5-
5 year period; and

6 (ii) shall publish a written report as-
7 sessing any proposed occupational licensing
8 law, or other proposed law that would ex-
9 pand the authority of an occupational li-
10 censing board to impose occupational regu-
11 lations, before the proposed law is sub-
12 mitted to a vote by the State legislature.

13 (C) REQUIREMENTS FOR ANALYSIS.—In
14 conducting the review required under subpara-
15 graph (A), the entity shall—

16 (i) determine whether the law or other
17 regulation satisfies the policy adopted
18 under subsection (b) of using the least re-
19 strictive regulation necessary to protect
20 consumers from real, substantial threats to
21 public health, safety, or welfare;

22 (ii) evaluate the effects of the law or
23 other regulation on opportunities for work-
24 ers, consumer choices and costs, general

1 unemployment, market competition, gov-
2 ernmental costs, and other effects;

3 (iii) compare the law or other regula-
4 tion to whether and how other States regu-
5 late the applicable occupation; and

6 (iv) if the applicable occupation is
7 subject to an occupational licensing law,
8 evaluate—

9 (I) the feasibility of entering into
10 reciprocity compacts with one or more
11 other States to improve worker mobil-
12 ity and labor market flexibility; and

13 (II) the advisability of endorsing
14 occupational licenses granted by other
15 States to spouses of active service
16 military members as if those occupa-
17 tional licenses were granted by the
18 State conducting the review.

19 **SEC. 6. JUDICIAL REVIEW.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—The immunity under section 4(a)
21 shall apply to any action of an occupational licensing
22 board of a State, or any action of a member, officer, or
23 employee of that board acting in the official capacity of
24 that member, officer, or employee, if—

1 (1) the actions of the occupational licensing
2 board or member, officer, or employee are author-
3 ized by a non-frivolous interpretation of the occupa-
4 tional licensing laws of the State;

5 (2) the State adopts a policy of using less re-
6 strictive alternatives to occupational licensing to ad-
7 dress real, substantial threats to public health, safe-
8 ty, or welfare, in accordance with section 5(b); and

9 (3) the State enacts legislation providing for ju-
10 dicial review of occupational licensing laws, in ac-
11 cordance with subsection (b) of this section.

12 (b) **JUDICIAL REVIEW LEGISLATION.**—Legislation
13 enacted by a State under subsection (a)(3)—

14 (1) shall—

15 (A) prohibit the State and any occupa-
16 tional licensing board from imposing an occupa-
17 tional licensing law unless the State—

18 (i) identifies an important government
19 interest in protecting against real, substan-
20 tial threats to public health, safety, or wel-
21 fare; and

22 (ii) demonstrates that the occupa-
23 tional licensing law is substantially related
24 to achievement of the important govern-
25 ment interest described in clause (i), in

1 light of the availability of less restrictive
2 alternatives to occupational licensing;

3 (B) provide an affirmative defense against
4 enforcement of any occupational licensing law
5 of the State under which the State shall be re-
6 quired to demonstrate that the standard under
7 subparagraph (A) has been met;

8 (C) establish a cause of action under
9 which—

10 (i) a person may bring an action for
11 injunctive relief against enforcement of an
12 occupational licensing law of the State;

13 (ii) the plaintiff bears the initial bur-
14 den to prove that the challenged occupa-
15 tional licensing law substantially burdens
16 the plaintiff's ability to engage in a lawful
17 occupation; and

18 (iii) once the plaintiff makes the ini-
19 tial showing under clause (ii), the State is
20 required to demonstrate that the standard
21 under subparagraph (A) has been met;

22 (D) provide for an award of reasonable
23 costs and attorney fees to a person who success-
24 fully challenges the application of an occupa-
25 tional licensing law of the State by—

1 (i) raising an affirmative defense
2 under subparagraph (B); or

3 (ii) bringing an action under subpara-
4 graph (C); and

5 (E) provide for independent judicial review
6 of the occupational licensing laws of the State
7 to ensure that the standard set forth in sub-
8 paragraph (A) has been met; and

9 (2) may not authorize a court to—

10 (A) uphold enforcement of an occupational
11 licensing law of the State simply because the
12 court believes the law is rationally related to a
13 legitimate governmental purpose;

14 (B) rely on hypothetical risks to public
15 safety, not substantiated by evidence in the
16 record, to uphold enforcement of an occupa-
17 tional licensing law of the State;

18 (C) defer to factual or legal conclusions of
19 another person or entity, rather than exercising
20 independent review; or

21 (D) rely on a post hoc justification for the
22 action of an occupational licensing board that
23 was not put forward by the board at the time
24 of the challenged action.

1 (c) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in sub-
2 section (b) shall be construed to require legislation enacted
3 by a State under subsection (a)(3) to provide a right to
4 recover monetary damages, other than reasonable costs
5 and attorney fees as provided under subsection (b)(1)(D).