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Improving licensing laws for barbers and cosmetologists in Minnesota



STATE LAWMAKERS SHOULD:

1. **Reduce required training hours for barbers and cosmetologists**
2. **Create a specialty hair technician license**
3. **Adopt inspection, registration, or other less burdensome rules**
4. **Repeal unnecessary administrative rules**

Cosmetology and barber licensing in Minnesota

Many occupations require state licensing. Generally, however, cosmetologists and barbers are two of the most widely licensed occupations and are also among the most onerously licensed, especially among low-income occupations.

In 2017, for example, the Institute of Justice published a study that analyzed 102 commonly licensed low-income occupations among the states. And among those, barbers and cosmetologists were in the top 10 most onerously licensed occupations.

For Minnesota, out of 34 licensed low-income occupations, barbers ranked the 8th highest, and

cosmetologists ranked the 10th highest most burdensome occupational licenses. Upon analyzing what is involved for an individual to meet the requirements of licensure in Minnesota, it is easy to see why this is the case. During the publication of the Institute of Justice’s report in 2017, Minnesota required anyone applying for a cosmetology license to complete 1,550 hours of education, write 3 exams, and pay \$285 in fees. To be a barber, Minnesota required an applicant to complete 1,500 hours of education, have 12 months of experience, write 4 exams, and pay \$182 in fees. The Institute of Justice estimated that individuals spent 613 days meeting requirements for a barber license and 362 days meeting cosmetology licensing requirements.

At present, Minnesota no longer requires anyone applying for a barber license to have 12 months of experience. But all the other requirements remain unchanged. And even though Minnesota isn’t the most burdensome state, licensing requirements for cosmetologists and barbers could be eased, especially considering how stringent they are compared to the requirements of other licensed occupations in the state.

Burdensome requirements keep low-income Minnesotans out

Burdensome requirements raise the cost of getting a license since applicants usually spend thousands of dollars on programs that take years to finish, while at the same time foregoing income. At the Minnesota School of Cosmetology, for instance, it costs nearly \$25,000 and takes 11 months of full-time studying to finish a cosmetology course. And at the Minnesota school of barbering, it costs nearly \$12,000 to finish a barber training program.

According to the Institute of Justice, most people attending cosmetology or barber school rarely graduate on time, which means they delay their entry into the workforce and lose even more money. The Institute of Justice estimated that in the six-year period ranging from the 2011- 2012 through 2016–2017 academic years, only about 24 percent of cosmetology students in Minnesota graduated on time. The rest took more than 12 months.

To make matters worse, the cosmetology industry mostly consists of low-income individuals who do not have tens of thousands of dollars to invest in cosmetology or barber school. So, a good portion of students ends up taking on debt to finance schooling. The Institute of Justice estimated that, on average, two out of every three cosmetology license holders in Minnesota had some federal student debt in the six-year period between the 2011-2012 through 2016–2017 academic calendars.

Reform is necessary

Compared to most licensed occupations, barbers and cosmetologists face more stringent requirements, despite the evidence showing that these licensing requirements have little to no effect on quality, safety, or health.

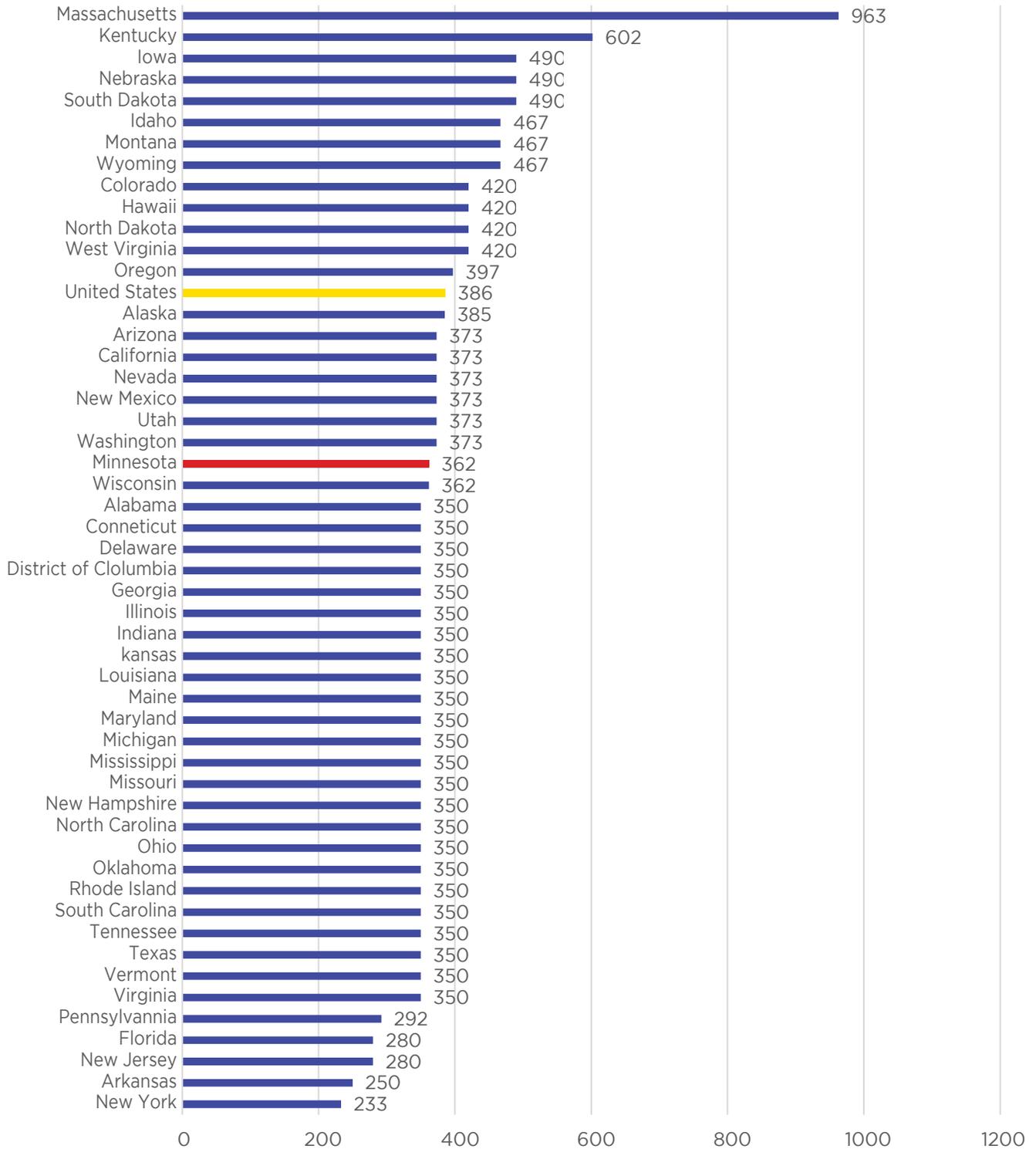
Additionally, these requirements restrict the supply of barber and cosmetology services, thereby raising prices. These requirements also make it hard for low-income individuals to enter the cosmetology and barbering industries, which can keep them poor, thereby worsening income inequality.

The Minnesota legislature should take steps to ease the burden of barber and cosmetology licensing and

TABLE 1:
MINNESOTA LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

	BARBERS	COSMETOLOGISTS
Fees	\$182	\$285
Required hours of education	1,500	1,550
Exams	4	3
Average Minimum Grade	10	12

**FIGURE 1:
ESTIMATED CALENDAR DAYS LOST WHILE MEETING
COSMETOLOGY LICENSING REQUIREMENTS, 2017**



SOURCE: INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE (2017)

make it easier for low-income Minnesotans to enter the industry.

Reduce training hours

It takes less training time to become an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) than it does to become a licensed barber or cosmetologist in Minnesota. To become an EMT, the state only requires that an applicant undertakes 150 hours of education. Cosmetologists and barbers, however, need 10 times as many training hours.

But being an EMT arguably involves more risk than cutting hair, putting on makeup, or styling hair. If these rules were based on the level of risk, the differences in education requirements would reflect that reality. The fact that training requirements are not driven by the level of risk suggests that there are some other factors at play. Most likely, industry incumbents push for strict requirements to keep their competition out.

Legislators need to reduce the number of training hours required for barbers or cosmetologists. The market system provides customers with numerous means for regulating quality — such as online reviews — so reducing training hours would not affect quality or safety but would improve supply and competition by encouraging more entrants into the industry. Moreover, less burdensome rules would enable low-income Minnesotans to enter these occupations without incurring massive student debt.

Create a specialty hair technician license

Nail technicians, estheticians, and eyelash technicians are allowed to apply for specialty licenses that require far fewer training hours that only cover their specific field of interest.

People that are only interested in hair care are not offered the same opportunity, however. In Minnesota, anyone who performs hair services must get a full cosmetology license which involves 1,550 hours of instruction and training in things like “makeup, shampooing, scalp and hair conditioning, hair design and shaping, chemical hair control, hair color-

ing, hair styling, skincare and facials, makeup, waxing, and manicuring and nail care.”

Services like manicuring, nail care, waxing, and makeup have nothing to do with hair. So, requiring would-be hair technicians to spend thousands of hours, and thousands of dollars learning about nails, skincare, facials, and makeup — skills that they are not interested in and will likely not use — only deters and delays applicants without improving safety or quality.

The legislature should create a hair technician license with fewer training requirements only specific to hair care. This would reduce the cost of entering the industry, giving more opportunities to low-income Minnesotans who are specifically interested in hair care. There is no reason to believe enacting a similar specialty license that already exists for estheticians, nail technicians, and eyelash technicians would have negative impacts on the safety and quality of hair care services.

Adopt inspection, registration, or other less burdensome rules

Apart from training hours, lawmakers can also adopt other less burdensome regulations like registration, certification, or inspection. Cosmetology and barbering are low-risk industries whereby hygiene — which can be regulated through inspection— is the biggest concern.

To ensure hygiene and safety, legislators can still require workers to be instructed in topics like chemical reactions, hygiene, and bacterial infections. Besides licensing, there are a lot of ways through which workers can obtain the necessary skills and knowledge to perform these tasks without spending tens of thousands of dollars as well as thousands of hours at a beauty school. These include apprenticeships or on-the-job training — methods that are significantly less costly compared to licensing.

Repeal unnecessary administrative rules

Some licensing rules for barbers and cosmetologists are unnecessary and they make licensing more

complex than it needs to be. Legislators need to repeal such rules. A few such laws include:

- requiring barbers to renew their licenses every year,
- requiring any barber student who has not obtained a license in more than four years since undergoing barber school to retake an additional 500 hours of barber school education,
- requiring managers to have both a salon and school manager license, and
- requiring cosmetology licensees from outside the state to write an extra exam in the state even if they have come from a state with similar education requirements.

The legislature should also repeal the “public welfare” rule which requires that when reviewing an application for a new barber school facility, the Min-

nesota Board of Barbershop Examiners should consider how existing barbershops and barber schools would be affected, and whether there is a need for a new facility. This rule gives incumbents power to block out their competition by claiming that new entrants would hurt existing establishments, even when customers would benefit from having more establishments to choose from.

Conclusion

Burdensome licensing rules for cosmetology and barbers have little to no effect on safety and quality, yet they raise prices and deny low-income Minnesotans jobs and business opportunities. Loosening these requirements would make it less costly for individuals to get licensed, which would improve supply and competition, thereby lowering prices for consumers. ■



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