



June 17th, 2026

Re: Expanding Barbering Pathways and Modernizing Kentucky’s Occupational-Licensing Laws

Dear Chair Raque-Adams, Chair Koch, and Honorable Members of the Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations:

My name is Michael Frazier, and I serve as State Affairs Manager for the Goldwater Institute. My name is Michael Frazier, and I serve as State Affairs Manager for the Goldwater Institute. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on expanding pathways into Kentucky’s barbering profession and modernizing occupational licensing more broadly for Kentuckians working in this industry.

On behalf of the Goldwater Institute, we support expanding pathways into barbering by reducing unnecessary barriers to work, creating new apprenticeship opportunities, developing additional credentialing pathways through higher education, and allowing more Kentuckians to earn a living through supervised, skills-based training.

Barbering, of course, is a skilled trade. It is also a path to work, entrepreneurship, and small-business ownership. However, when the state requires excessive hours, limits training options, and forces people into one narrow pathway, it makes it harder for people to enter the workforce, especially in rural communities where access to licensed barbering schools may be limited.

Our goal is not to eliminate standards, but to increase access and opportunity while preserving a standard to protect public health and safety in the profession. Kentucky’s Barbering board has only **13 Board-listed barbering schools or campuses** serving the entire Commonwealth, and even that number includes one Owensboro campus listed as coming soon in June 2026. With only 13 barbering schools, several are clustered in Louisville and Lexington, leaving major access gaps for rural Kentucky.

The proposed revival for shop-based apprenticeship is an important first step to close this gap and increase access to opportunity to allow aspiring barbers to train under licensed professionals while keeping safeguards in place, including sanitation requirements, supervision, consumer notice, and board oversight. Adding additional pathways, as proposed in HB 903 by Representative Peyton Griffiee, would help remove these barriers and provide new opportunities for aspiring barbers.

Kentucky may also consider a complementary pathway through the Council on Postsecondary Education and KCTCS¹. The proposed pathway already fits within Kentucky’s statutory framework. KRS 164.020 gives CPE authority over statewide postsecondary planning, institutional missions, and academic program approval, while KRS 164.580 directs KCTCS to increase the technical skills and professional expertise of Kentucky workers through associate degrees, technical degrees, diplomas, and certificate programs. The goal would not be to replace traditional barbering schools, but to create a parallel workforce-training option through CPE-approved certificates, diplomas, or apprenticeship programs offered at public institutions. **Other states already use a similar model as proposed here, including Virginia, Louisiana, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Mississippi, Arizona, Washington, and Illinois.**

Kentucky already does something similar in cosmetology through KCTCS, and that same workforce-development infrastructure could help close access gaps in barbering. With only a limited number of Board-recognized barbering schools serving the Commonwealth, offering barbering programs through KCTCS campuses and satellite locations could expand access in rural and underserved communities, reduce travel and cost barriers, and give more Kentuckians a practical pathway into a skilled trade while leaving licensure, sanitation, inspections, examinations, and enforcement with the Kentucky Board of Barbering.

Barbering is a practical place to start, but it is not the only occupation where Kentucky should take a hard look at licensing barriers. **Kentucky ranks near the top nationally for occupational-licensing burden. The Archbridge Institute’s 2025 State Occupational Licensing Index ranks Kentucky as the 4th most burdensome state in the country, and the Institute for Justice has found that nearly one in five Kentucky workers must get a government license before they can legally do their job.** Goldwater’s Right to Earn a Living Act provides a straightforward standard for reform: occupational regulations should be necessary to protect public health and safety, carefully tailored to that purpose, and no more restrictive than required.

The Goldwater Institute’s **Right To Earn A Living Act** gives workers and entrepreneurs a way to challenge licensing rules that go beyond legitimate health and safety needs, and it requires the government to defend those restrictions with real evidence instead of assumptions. The Act simply requires the government to justify barriers to work instead of assuming every restriction is necessary. In barbering and across Kentucky’s licensing system, the burden should not fall on workers to prove they deserve the right to earn a living. The burden should fall on the government to prove why it is standing in their way.

¹ This proposal is offered as a policy recommendation by the Goldwater Institute and should not be construed as a proposal advanced by the Council on Postsecondary Education or KCTCS. Any such pathway would require appropriate review by the relevant state agencies, public institutions, accrediting bodies, and regulatory authorities before implementation.

The Goldwater Institute’s **Breaking Down Barriers to Work Act**, also known as universal recognition, provides another proven way to reduce licensing barriers without lowering standards. Under the Act, a qualified worker who is already licensed in another state, has held that license in good standing, and has been trained or tested for a similar scope of practice may receive a license without being forced to repeat unnecessary education, training, or testing. The reform does not delicense any profession or remove state oversight. Licensed workers remain subject to Kentucky law, Kentucky regulatory boards, applicable fees, discipline, sanitation rules, inspections, and any state-specific legal requirements. The same principle applies directly to barbering.

A barber who has already been safely practicing in another state should not have to start over simply because he or she moves to Kentucky, and an aspiring Kentucky barber should not be limited to one narrow pathway when competency can be demonstrated through supervised training, apprenticeship, examination, or another approved credential. **Broad universal recognition has been enacted in states including Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming, with other states adopting lighter or targeted versions.**

Arizona’s experience with universal recognition shows that licensing reform can expand work opportunities without abandoning public protections. After Arizona adopted the Goldwater Institute’s universal recognition reform in 2019, more than 10,000 professionals² were able to practice without restarting duplicative licensing processes, and the reform helped create a national model for reducing barriers to work. A Common Sense Institute analysis³ found that Arizona’s universal recognition law was projected to increase employment by at least 15,991 workers over 10 years, increase the state’s population by 44,376 people by 2030, and increase Arizona’s GDP by at least \$1.5 billion.

Kentucky can apply the same lesson in barbering and across occupational licensing: the state can protect consumers while making it easier for trained and qualified people to work. For barbering, that means recognizing more pathways into the profession, including apprenticeships, CPE and KCTCS credentialing options, and recognition for experienced out-of-state barbers who have already demonstrated competency. A worker who has safely practiced a trade elsewhere should not be forced to start over in Kentucky, and an aspiring Kentucky barber should not be locked into one pathway when skill, sanitation, supervision, and competency can be established through less burdensome means.

Barbering can be an incredible workforce opportunity to close gaps and provide credentialing to Kentucky’s workforce goals. Expanding apprenticeships, reducing unnecessary barriers, and creating

²See, Taylor Walker, *10,000 Arizonans Free to Work Thanks to Goldwater’s Reform*, Goldwater Institute (Oct. 24, 2024), <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/10000-arizonans-free-to-work-thanks-to-goldwaters-reform/>

³ See, Common Sense Institute Arizona, *Economic Implications of Universal License Recognition: A Review of 2019’s HB 2569*(May 22, 2022), <https://www.common Sense Institute.us.org/arizona/research/jobs-and-our-economy/economic-implications-of-universal-license-recognition-hb-2569>

additional credentialing pathways would help more Kentuckians enter the workforce while preserving the health and safety standards the public expects. Kentucky, however, should view barbering reform as part of a broader occupational-licensing conversation. **The guiding question should be straightforward: What is the least restrictive way to protect the public while allowing Kentuckians to work?**

The proposed barbering program reduction of hours, apprenticeship expansion, potential CPE and KCTCS pathways with the Right to Earn a Living Act and the Breaking Down Barriers to Work Act all point in the same direction. Together, they create a workforce strategy that protects public health and safety, preserves legitimate standards, and removes unnecessary barriers that keep trained and qualified people from earning a living.

As part of broader effort to modernize Kentucky's occupational licensing laws, Goldwater has provided the committee with a one-pager on expanding access to barbering careers, as well as a copy of our proposed **Right to Earn a Living Act and Breaking Down Barriers Act⁴** for your review.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue. I appreciate the committee's consideration and would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



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⁴ Representative Jennifer Henson Decker has agreed to file and serve as the primary sponsor in the House for both the proposed **Right to Earn a Living Act**.