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The Transportation Interim Committee
c/o Legislative Services Division
State Capitol, Room 110
1301 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

SUBJECT: Systemic Devaluation of Vocational and Professional Competence via Standardized Testing Monopolies: A Proposal for Universal, Performance-Based Decentralization

To the Members of the Legislative Committees and Licensing Directors,

The current framework governing professional, vocational, and occupational licensing in this country does not measure or protect public safety—it actively degrades it. By centering entry into virtually every professional field on arbitrary, standardized testing matrices, the regulatory state has forced our educational, technical, and professional schools to abandon substantive, real-world instruction. Training programs across all sectors have evolved into corporate compliance mills entirely optimized to teach applicants "how to pass the test," completely ignoring the functional, practical mechanics required to safely and effectively practice a trade or profession.

Furthermore, any administrative attempt to resolve these systemic failures by forcing applicants into state-certified institutional monopolies simply recreates the same bureaucratic inefficiencies. This petition demands a comprehensive legislative overhaul: the absolute abolition of standardized entry testing—including all written, oral, and 'behind the controls' practical examinations—and institutional training monopolies across all occupations, in favor of a decentralized, learner-driven practical training model backed by a robust, field-appropriate mentorship framework and un-shielded personal accountability.

I. The Universal Educational Distortions of the Testing Cartel

The mandate for standardized testing corrupts the educational pipeline of every industry it touches. When a regulatory body establishes an arbitrary, multiple-choice snapshot or artificial stunt-based exam as the ultimate gatekeeper, it establishes a destructive "cram-and-dump" culture. Professional training programs respond by stripping away high-utility, real-world practical skills and replacing them with rote memorization and compliance-focused test preparation.

To illustrate the scope of this systemic rot, we look to four distinct professional sectors—not as isolated grievances, but as universal evidence of a failed paradigm:

- **The Medical and Healthcare Sectors:** Nursing and clinical support programs are heavily gatekept by highly standardized board exams. Yet, the current testing matrix heavily prioritizes textbook data memorization over real-world clinical intuition, stress-tolerance, and split-second patient management.

Facilities regularly inherit "highly certified" graduates who excel at multiple-choice exams but lack basic, intuitive competence in high-stakes patient care.

- **The Legal Profession:** The traditional bar exam operates as a massive exercise in rote memorization, forcing applicants to spend thousands of dollars on specialized corporate test-prep courses to memorize archaic legal definitions they will never use. Passing this exam demonstrates zero predictive validity regarding an attorney's actual capability to navigate a real-world courtroom, negotiate an active contract, or ethically manage a client's crisis.
- **The Real Estate and Financial Brokerage Fields:** Applicants for real estate and financial licensing spend weeks memorizing complex, highly specific regulatory booklets to pass a state exam. Upon entering the field, these newly certified agents frequently possess zero practical comprehension of how to construct an airtight contract, protect a client from structural liability, or evaluate the real-world safety and viability of a property.
- **The Commercial Transportation Sector:** In commercial trucking, mandatory state exams force students to spend weeks mastering useless yard stunts and reciting hyper-detailed pre-trip inspection scripts. Consequently, compliance-focused driving schools regularly graduate students without ever teaching them the basic physical and mechanical tasks of the industry—such as coupling a trailer, raising heavy landing gear, or managing high-pressure pneumatic and electrical connections.

In every single instance, the test creates an expensive, artificial barrier that gives the public a dangerous illusion of safety while actively starving the applicant of real-world operational mastery.

II. Empirical Failure of Testing as a Predictive Metric

Public policy must be grounded in empirical data rather than institutional habit. Modern macroeconomic and educational research consistently demonstrates that standardized occupational testing metrics completely lack predictive validity regarding real-world performance, safety, or quality:

- **The Zero-Correlation Data:** Recent regression discontinuity (RD) design studies analyzing professional licensing metrics across multiple industries show that while licensing exams create massive economic drag and artificially delay qualified personnel from entering the workforce, the scores themselves demonstrate *no statistically justifiable correlation* to eventual real-world quality or safety outcomes. Narrowly passing an exam does not make a professional safer or more competent; it merely indicates an aptitude for test-taking.
- **The Institutional Shift Away from Snapshots:** Data compiled by progressive vocational and professional sectors confirms that standardized, single-day snapshots fail to accurately gauge functional capability or operational growth. This data-driven realization has forced industries to abandon rigid, administrative testing frameworks altogether, shifting instead toward continuous, on-the-job peer validation where real-world safety is verified through ongoing daily performance under the direct supervision of licensed mentors—not through artificial exams.

III. Decentralization and Case-by-Case Educational Autonomy

The state-mandated monopoly on training verification ignores a fundamental reality: individuals possess completely distinct learning styles. While a small subset of applicants may thrive within a rigid, group-based institutional school, a significant portion of the workforce achieves optimal operational mastery through direct, one-on-one mentorship.

We propose a universal return to decentralized, competency-based development, utilizing field-appropriate apprenticeship, permit, or provisional frameworks. Public policy should explicitly recognize any fully licensed, experienced professional as a legitimate instructional source:

1. **Deregulating the Choice of Instructor:** Restricting instructional capacity via state-certified school mandates places artificial financial and regulatory burdens on citizens. Individuals must have the unconstrained freedom to choose their own training environment, whether that involves a structured corporate academy or a highly experienced private mentor, owner-operator, or individual specialist.
2. **The Eliminating of Second-Tier Bureaucracy:** Forcing training providers to seek "state certification" merely pushes the testing cartel back one step. It forces the instructors and institutions to pass bureaucratic compliance exams, ensuring that they will teach their students to pass compliance exams, creating a closed loop of paper-pushing that entirely misses the point of practical education.

IV. Proposed Universal Reform Framework

We demand a comprehensive legislative overhaul to dismantle this testing loop and restore true integrity to professional and vocational development:

- **Abolish All Standardized Testing Formats:** Eliminate all administrative requirements for state-regulated entry examinations, explicitly encompassing all written theory tests, oral technical boards, and closed-environment "behind the controls" hands-on evaluations. The state shall not implement, mandate, or enforce any alternative form of testing, examination, or administrative assessment.
- **Replace Exams with Direct Peer Validation:** Transition entirely to a mentorship verification model. An applicant's eligibility to operate independently shall be determined solely by the direct, ongoing observation of their chosen licensed instructor over the course of their practical training cycle, eliminating the concept of an "examination day" entirely.
- **Implement Direct Affirmations of Professional Responsibility:** Replace the passing score metric with a legally binding sign-off. An applicant may only transition to full, independent operational status once their chosen, licensed mentor certifies their real-world capabilities via a signed affidavit, at which point the incoming professional assumes immediate, documented, un-shielded personal and civil liability for their work.

We must strip away the artificial circus acts of the testing room, stop forcing schools to teach to a broken exam, deregulate the training space to allow direct private mentorship, and establish an economy-wide system based entirely on true, real-world training and uncompromised professional accountability.

Respectfully submitted,



Benjamin Warren