On April 23, Louisiana’s House Commerce Committee approved House Bill 405, a measure that would deregulate professional wrestling and remove oversight authority from the state’s Boxing and Wrestling Commission. The commission remains unanimously opposed to HB 405, citing their role in protecting the “health and safety of both the participants and the folks in the audience.”

Louisiana is far from the first state to take a step toward deregulating sports entertainment, and this committee hearing is indicative of a larger, nationwide conversation. In 1997, New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, flanked by popular pro wrestler The Undertaker, signed into law a bill that recognized professional wrestling as “entertainment, not a sport” and removed the state’s regulatory authority over the profession.

Even as far back as 1988, the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission recommended the deregulation of professional wrestling, citing a “built-in incentive for contestants to stay healthy...given the promoters’ interest in keeping wrestlers healthy enough to maintain the road show.”

Lobbying efforts, led by World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc., have focused on eliminating oversight by state athletic commissions. Former WWE Executive Vice President (and former Trump administration official) Linda McMahon has often compared their profession to the Harlem Globetrotters - top-tier athletes who entertain fans at a show with a predetermined outcome.

Eleven states currently do not regulate professional wrestling specifically, and many other states, acknowledging material differences between professional wrestling and boxing/MMA, have moved regulation from under an athletic board to under various insurance or licensing boards.

Professional wrestling regulations vary state-to-state, but many elements are common: state occupational licensure contingent upon fees and a positive physical examination, media fees, on-site EMT and medical staff, and inspector clearance of facilities and props. Given the interstate nature of professional wrestling, competitors typically work in multiple states in a single week, forcing them to apply, pay and pass requisite examinations in each state with a licensure requirement.

The current debates around regulating professional wrestling center around two main questions: “Is professional wrestling a sport?” and “Does the state have a role in protecting the health and safety of the competitors?” States have differing combinations of answers to these questions, which creates a patchwork of rules and regulations that these national companies must navigate.

The example of professional wrestling indicates that occupational licensing affects even niche professions. Pro wrestling is not unlike EMTs or nursing in its need for interstate licensure mobility. With such similar requisites for licensure, states seeking to reap the economic benefits of professional wrestling programming could benefit from an interstate compact around licensing of professional wrestlers and promoters.