On Sept. 3, 2019, Virginia became the first state to fully digitize its professional licensing and credentialing system. Many professions take advantage of current technology to offer digital copies of licenses and certifications, but before September, no state offered universal electronic licensing. Through a partnership between the Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation and the free online credentialing service, Merit, all licensed professionals in Virginia will be able to receive a digital copy of their license. According to the 2018-2020 Virginia appropriations bill, electronic licenses now satisfy any statute or regulation that requires credentials to be posted, displayed or produced.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam announced the partnership stating, “Electronic credentials will help cut red tape and modernize what is currently an antiquated system. The innovative use of technology by a state agency to streamline and enhance its services to Virginia’s citizens, consumers, workers and industry is one of the reasons why our Commonwealth is the best place for business.”

Starting immediately, the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation will issue digital licenses and invite licensed professionals to create an online account with Merit. Once professionals create an account, they will always have access to a digital copy of their most recent licenses and certifications using Merit’s website or mobile app. Professionals will also be electronically notified when licenses must be renewed. Digital licenses will be issued in addition to physical licenses, and professionals will still receive mail and physical licenses from the department.

Digital credentials are now available to all 310,000 licensed professionals in over 40 professions serviced by the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation. These benefits come at no cost to licensees or to the state, and no funds were set aside in the 2018–2020 appropriations bill for this service.

The Home Builders Association of Virginia represents more than 83,000 licensed members and supports the partnership.

“This partnership is the beginnings of an infrastructure that will help ensure that people with the right skills find the right jobs,” said CEO M. Craig Toalson. “This new system will make licensing easier for everyone involved and will allow workers to spend less time navigating a complex paperwork process and more time focusing on the careers that they love.”

This announcement comes less than two years after Virginia Regulatory Reduction Pilot Program (HB 883) was signed into law by Gov. Northam. The program aims to reduce 25% of regulations and regulatory requirements in the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation by July 1, 2021.

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