Often a licensed professional wishing to enter into a new state finds difficulty obtaining the license needed to practice their profession. The delay in obtaining their professional license could mean a lack of income, lost employment opportunities or even a decision to not move into the state.

On July 1, 2019, Gov. Tom Wolf signed HB 1172 [2] which makes Pennsylvania the second state to recognize out-of-state licenses. The bill mandates boards and commissions in the Pennsylvania Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs provide licensure by endorsement for out-of-state applicants if the applicant meets certain criteria.

Pennsylvania has 29 boards and commissions that license 255 occupations. The boards that are subject to this legislation are listed here [3].

“This new law will reduce barriers for new Pennsylvanians to work here and shows this is a land of opportunity,” said Gov. Wolf. “Portability is especially helpful for members of the military and their spouses who frequently move between states in service of the country and often have difficulty quickly getting a license to work in their profession.

The out-of-state applicant must:

- Hold a licensure from another state with substantial equivalent requirements (determined by the board)
- Demonstrate competency through experience or continuing education for at least two of the past 5 years
- Has not committed a crime that would prevent him from being granted a license in Pennsylvania
- Has not been disciplined by the state in which he was originally licensed
- Pays Pennsylvania licensing fee

The bill’s “substantially similar” requirement is worth noting. This is a key difference between Pennsylvania and Arizona’s definition of universal recognition. Arizona does not require substantially similar requirements while Pennsylvania does. This still allows for the boards to determine whether or not the out of state applicant has the training, experience, education similar to what applicants in Pennsylvania are required to do. This isn’t an issue in professions where variance among state licensing requirements is negligible. However, this provision still gives the boards discretion to deny an applicant from a state with perceived “lesser” requirements.

The bill does give the board authority to grant a provisional endorsement license while an applicant completes requirements specific to Pennsylvania. If there is a Pennsylvania specific licensing exam or an additional licensing requirement that is particular to the scope of practice in Pennsylvania, a board may grant a provisional license so the practitioner can get to work while completing that additional requirement.

The bill also clarifies that this provision does not interfere with existing reciprocity agreements or interstate occupational licensing compacts. If you participate in an interstate compact, you are still subject to the universal requirements listed out in the compact.
Prior to HB 1172, many professionals licensed out-of-state had to complete Pennsylvania’s entire licensing process rather than just state specific requirements. The arduous, time-consuming process caused workers moving to Pennsylvania to potentially lose income and career opportunities, and reduced the pool of talented workers for businesses.

“I will continue working with the General Assembly to remove barriers to work for qualified Pennsylvanians and to ensure that we are welcoming to new Pennsylvanians wishing to practice their licensed profession,” said Gov. Wolf.