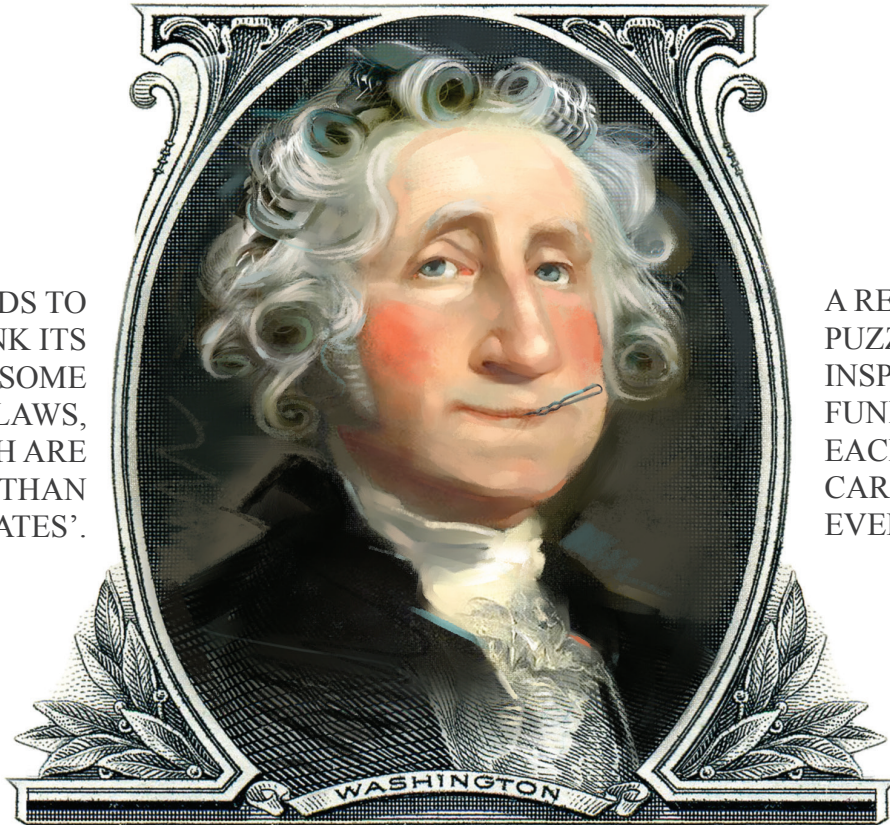


IOWA NEEDS TO  
RETHINK ITS  
BURDENSOME  
LICENSING LAWS,  
WHICH ARE  
TOUGHER THAN  
MOST STATES’.



MARK MARTURELLO/REGISTER ILLUSTRATION

A REGULATORY  
PUZZLER: WHY  
INSPECT IOWA  
FUNERAL HOMES  
EACH YEAR, BUT  
CARE FACILITIES  
EVERY 2 1/2 YEARS?

## IRRATIONAL LICENSING LAWS

2,100 HOURS TO CUT HAIR; 150 HOURS FOR EMTs

### EDITORIAL WRITING

Iowans need alternatives in higher education. But they don't need more cosmetology schools. There are 27 in this state. Students — often young women from low-income families — spend months cutting hair, giving manicures, waxing eyebrows and providing other services. They may be pressured to sell shampoo and other products for the school. The school keeps all the money paid by customers. The students work for free as part of their training, and they pay tuition to obtain the 2,100 hours of training and education Iowa requires for a cosmetology license.

It was 1967 when Clyde Kenyon, then the director of the Iowa Department of Health's Barbering Division, observed what has become an enduring truth: Barber and cosmetology schools are the only businesses where "people pay you to work for nothing."

And these for-profit cosmetology schools are businesses. A few have shown they are adept at

exploiting students to rake in money for the school owners.

As Iowa families struggle with decisions about the cost and quality of higher education, they should know "beauty school" may be a bad investment. State lawmakers should address outdated and burdensome licensing requirements that allow schools to take advantage of students who later cannot find decent-paying jobs.

### Cost can be outrageous

Federal education transparency requirements allowed The Des Moines Register's editorial board to check the "cost of attendance" at many cosmetology schools in Iowa. Tuition, fees and other expenses ranged from about \$20,000 to more than \$34,000 to complete programs that run about 14 months. These figures do not factor in the additional costs students incur if they do not finish school in the allotted time.

Continued on next page

To compare, a student could earn a two-year degree from Des Moines Area Community College in everything from dental hygiene to culinary arts for about half the cost of cosmetology school. In less time, she could receive certifications for dozens of jobs. And unlike beauty school, the credits earned will likely transfer to a four-year school if she wants to continue her education later.

Misleading earnings potential is reported

The American College of Hairstyling, which has two locations in Iowa, includes a “salary and wage calculator” on its website. It tells potential students they can earn as much as \$69,120. “This is with non-stop customers! A more realistic estimate assumes that they have both good days and bad days during the year, which is represented by the Low (\$22,418) and Medium (\$45,619) salaries,” according to the website.

Then there is the truth. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median income for Iowa “hairdressers, hairstylists and cosmetologists” was \$10.69 per hour, or about \$22,000, in 2011. And those are people who were lucky to find a job at all.

There are about 16,000 state-licensed cosmetologists in Iowa (that does not include thousands more individuals licensed as “barbers,” “nail technicians” or “estheticians”). Only about 9,000 people are actually employed in the profession. Though the state issued more than 1,000 new cosmetology licenses in 2012, federal estimates say there are only about 220 annual job openings in Iowa.

Legislature should update law

If you want a license to work as an emergency medical technician, responding to heart attacks and accidents, you need about 150 hours of training. To get a license as a cosmetologist, cutting and coloring hair, you need 2,100 hours of training, an education requirement that was established in 1940.

No state requires more hours; most require significantly fewer. In New York or Massachusetts, a cosmetology student needs 1,000 hours of training and education.

“It’s too many hours,” said Mark Oswald, owner of Iowa School of Beauty in Urbandale, of Iowa’s requirement.

State lawmakers should reduce the number of hours



required to obtain a cosmetology license. Earlier this year, Republican lawmakers in Missouri proposed making licenses optional for cosmetologists and barbers in that state.

Government should limit tuition aid

A young woman will think twice about enrolling in cosmetology school if no one provides her the grants and loans to cover the cost. Though the federal government has taken steps to limit financial aid available to attend schools where a high percentage of students later default on their loans, more needs to be done to protect some students from incurring huge student loan debt only to land in a low-wage job.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, 18 cosmetology schools in Iowa collected more than \$6.6 million in Pell grant money on behalf of 1,432 students in 2010. This is in addition to the thousands of dollars in loans the average student takes out to cover the tuition and has to repay later.

The Iowa Legislature also provides \$1,200 tuition grants to help students pay for cosmetology and barber schools. This is a questionable use of taxpayer money at a time when the various demands on the state treasury far exceed the state’s resources.

Some people long to be a cosmetologist. But pursuing that dream should not require paying a small fortune to spend months engaged almost in slave labor at a beauty school. Teachers, school counselors and parents should warn students of the realities of cosmetology schools and the difficult job market, and low wages, that await.

Iowa lawmakers should reduce the unnecessary and burdensome licensing requirements to work at a hair salon. While they are at it, they should examine the multitude of questionable licensing requirements for other job areas.

“THE BARBER SCHOOL BUSINESS HAS BEEN A VERY LUCRATIVE BUSINESS SINCE WORLD WAR II. IT’S THE ONLY BUSINESS, BESIDES COSMETOLOGY SCHOOLS, WHERE PEOPLE PAY YOU TO WORK FOR NOTHING.”

Clyde Kenyon,  
director of the Iowa Department of Health’s Barbering Division in 1967

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