

Repealing Occupational-Licensing Laws Will Reduce Crime

People are more [likely to return to a life of crime](#) if they can't find a job after being released from prison, according to a study released by the Manhattan Institute. Occupational licensing laws make it harder for them to find a job. *Reason* magazine [notes](#) that a ten-year study released last year by Arizona State University found that “formerly incarcerated residents are more likely to commit a new crime within three years of being released from prison if they live in a state where they’re prohibited from getting a license solely for having a criminal record.”

Once upon a time, occupational licensing laws only restricted access to jobs that had unique privileges (such as lawyers, who can send you a subpoena demanding [your diary](#)) or that had unique public safety implications (like a surgeon, who can kill you through a botched operation). Not anymore.

Now, many jobs that pose no special risks or need for regulation are off-limits to people who have criminal convictions, or never committed a crime, but can't afford to spend years on unnecessary training that may be irrelevant or obsolete. Florida requires interior designers to undergo [six years of training](#), including [two years](#) at a state-approved college. Other states force aspiring hair stylists to first attend exploitative beauty schools that often [rip off their students](#). And “twenty-one states require a license for travel guides,” [notes](#) the Brookings Institution. Occupational licensing [has expanded](#) from covering 5% of the workforce in the 1950s to 30% today, to the point where it covers many ordinary jobs.

So there is no reason ex-cons should not be able to hold many of the jobs now off-limits to them due to occupational licensing regulations. It's not as if consumers benefit. Indeed, according to Morris Kleiner at the University of Minnesota, occupational licensing [has](#) either no impact or even a [negative impact](#) on the quality of services provided to customers.