

Architecture Degree Reclassification

SUPPORT:

HR0678

Rep. Joyce Mason

We are urging Illinois lawmakers to formally ask the United States Department of Education to reverse a recent regulatory reclassification that strips architecture graduate degrees of their "professional" status. Introduced by Representative Joyce Mason, HRO678 argues that this federal change enacted under the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* (OBBBA) - ignores the rigorous licensing requirements of the profession and creates an insurmountable financial barrier for the next generation of architects.

This resolution aligns with a national effort by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), who are advocating for the "Professional Student Degree Act" in Congress to override the Department of Education's narrow definition.

As the **first state to license architects**, through the 1897 Illinois Architects Act, Illinois has long led the nation in recognizing the rigorous standards and expertise required for architectural licensure. Supporting HRO678 honors this historic legacy and continues to champion public safety by urging the federal government to reverse its reclassification of architecture graduate degrees.

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Financial Impacts: Starting in July 2026, "non-professional" graduate students will be capped at \$20,500 annually (\$100,000 aggregate) in federal loans. This is less than half of what is available for professional degrees, which will make architecture school unaffordable for everyone except the wealthiest students. The Grad PLUS loans will also be eliminated.

Threats to Diversity and Inclusion: By capping loans at a level far below the actual cost of most NAAB-accredited programs, the profession will be "purged" of talent from middle- and low-income backgrounds. The concern is that architecture will become an "elite-only" profession, reserved for those with independent wealth.

Factual Error: Architecture meets every criterion of a "professional" degree as defined by the *Higher Education Act of 1965*. Architects must complete 5 to 7 years of specialized education, thousands of hours of supervised experience, and pass the national Architect Registration Examination (ARE).

Economic Impact on Illinois Communities: A shortage of licensed architects will have a "depressive effect" on the broader construction market.

- **Increased Costs:** Reduced competition among architects will drive up the cost of design services for schools, municipalities, and homeowners.
- **Rural/ Suburban Vulnerability:** Rural and suburban Illinois communities already face more limited access to architectural services; this policy is expected to hit these areas the hardest.

Public Health and Safety: Architects are legally responsible for the "health, safety, and welfare" of the public. Treating their education as "non-professional" is framed as a dismissal of the expertise required to design safe, resilient infrastructure.