

Occupational Licensing

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Issue Primer

This primer explains the basic legal structure of occupational licensing in Utah and how licenses are authorized, administered, and reviewed.

What is Occupational Licensing

An occupational license is state permission to work in a specific occupation. Utah generally treats a license as an authorization based on personal qualifications that a person must have before working for compensation in that field. Those qualifications may involve education, testing, work experience, continuing education, or other standards set by law.

Utah also uses other forms of occupational regulation. Certification usually controls who may use a state-recognized title, while registration generally requires a person to register with the state before working. These tools do not always restrict work in the same way as full licensure.

That distinction matters because Utah's review process asks whether a public concern requires licensure or could be addressed through a narrower form of regulation. For professions administered by the Utah Division of Professional Licensing, or DOPL, Title 58 uses "license" broadly to include a license, certificate, registration, or permit. Because of that, the legal effect of a credential depends on the specific statute and rules for that profession.

Why Licensing Exists

Utah's licensing-review statute connects occupational regulation to public welfare. Licensing is most justified when an occupation creates a clear and significant risk of harm and when regulation is likely to reduce that risk in a way that is reasonable compared with its costs. This structure does not assume that licensing is always necessary or always unnecessary. Instead, Utah requires reviewers to weigh public protection against the practical effects of regulation.

Utah's review process is meant to keep that analysis evidence-based. Before new occupational regulation is recommended, the Office of Professional Licensure Review, or OPLR, looks at the seriousness of the potential harm, whether regulation would actually reduce that harm, and whether a less burdensome approach could protect the public. The process also considers how regulation may affect access to services, the supply of workers, and the cost of entering a profession.

Administration of Licensing

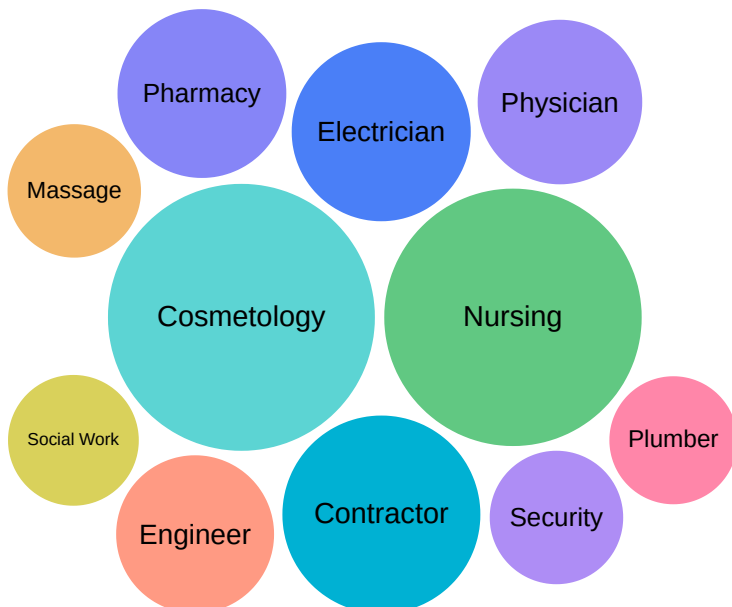
Occupational licensing in Utah is primarily authorized by statute. The Legislature decides whether an occupation is subject to state licensing, certification, registration, or another regulatory model. Agencies then administer the statutes they are assigned, adopt rules within statutory authority, process applications, and enforce legal requirements.

DOPL is the main licensing agency for professions regulated under Title 58, Occupations and Professions. Utah law creates DOPL within the Department of Commerce and directs it to administer and enforce Title 58. DOPL's public-facing services include license applications, renewals, license verification, complaint intake, fingerprinting information, and public disciplinary-action searches. [DOPL's public license lookup](#) lists approximately 60 professional categories as of July 7, 2026, including fields such as accountancy, architecture, construction trades, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, mental health professions, physical therapy, plumbing, social work, veterinary medicine, and many others.

Not every licensed occupation in Utah is regulated by DOPL. [Real estate](#), mortgage, and appraisal professionals are regulated by the Utah Division of Real Estate. [Educator licensing](#) for Utah public schools is administered by the Utah State Board of Education. The practice of law is governed by the Utah Supreme Court, including rules for admission, conduct, and discipline. This means that Utah's occupational licensing system is not housed in one single agency, even though DOPL administers many of the state's professional and occupational licenses.

Utah Licensing at a Glance

Cosmetology and nursing are Utah's largest licensed professions by volume, while occupations like security and massage represent a smaller share of total licensees. DOPL oversees 348,196 active licenses across the state.



Source: [Data from the Department of Commerce](#)

The Role of Professional Boards

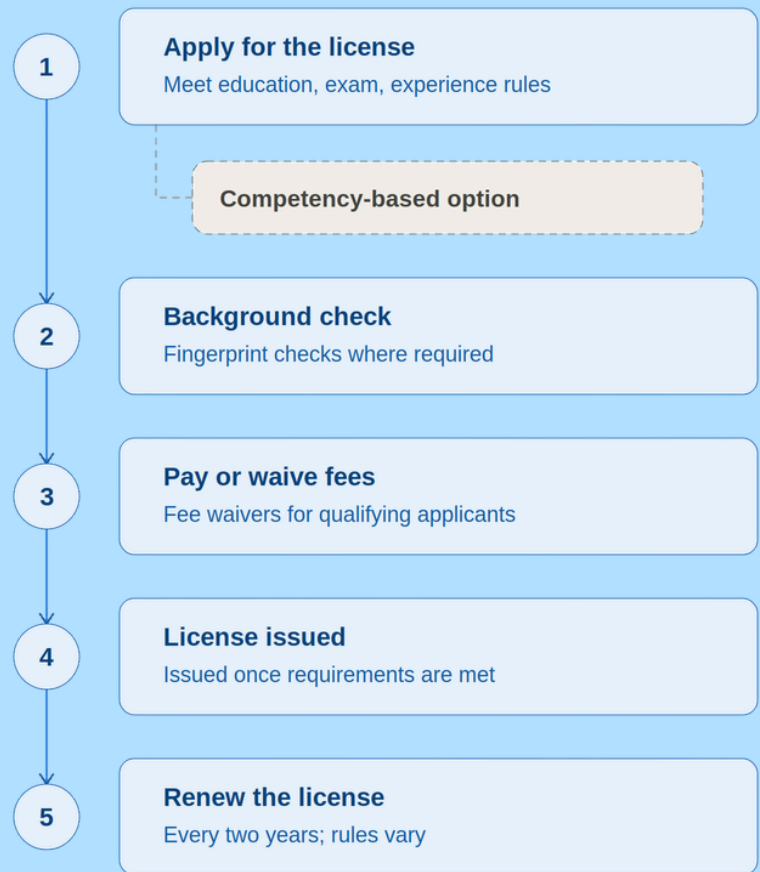
Many DOPL-regulated occupations also have professional boards. These boards provide subject-matter expertise, but they do not independently decide when Utah requires a license. Their authority comes from statute and rule.

Boards may recommend rule changes, assist with application review, advise on examination or supervision standards, and help evaluate whether current regulations protect the public. Utah law also directs boards to consider whether regulations are unnecessary or ineffective. In practice, boards serve as expert advisory bodies, while the Legislature and agencies retain the authority to set licensing policy.

The Licensing Process

The steps to obtain a Utah license vary by occupation, but applicants generally must meet the qualifications set by statute and rule before DOPL issues a license. Requirements differ by profession and may include education, supervised practice, testing, continuing education, or background screening.

Most DOPL licenses renew on a two-year cycle, though deadlines and requirements vary by profession. Utah law also allows fee waivers for qualifying applicants and permits DOPL to accept demonstrated competency in place of certain time-based requirements, reflecting the state's broader effort to measure actual competency rather than time spent in a program.



Enforcement & Accountability

Licensing gives the state a way to respond when a licensed practitioner violates legal or professional standards. Under [Title 58](#), DOPL may investigate regulated activity, issue subpoenas, take enforcement action, and place limits on a license when the law supports doing so. DOPL may also issue cease-and-desist orders and administrative penalties in appropriate cases.

Discipline may be based on failure to meet qualifications, unlawful conduct, unprofessional conduct, incompetence, or other conduct that affects safe and competent practice. Utah law also requires individualized consideration when a license is denied solely because of a criminal conviction. In that situation, DOPL must consider whether the conviction is substantially related to the applicant's ability to practice safely and competently.

For the public, [DOPL](#) provides tools to verify a license, file a complaint, and search public disciplinary actions. These tools help consumers, employers, and policymakers see whether a practitioner is licensed and whether the state has taken public action.

Review and Reform of Licensing Requirements

Utah's formal licensing-review process is administered by the Office of Professional Licensure Review, or OPLR, a Department of Commerce policy-analysis office that supports legislators and executive-branch agencies. Its work focuses on whether occupational regulation is justified by public risk, whether it improves access and consumer protection, and whether a less burdensome approach could address the same concern.

Utah requires OPLR to review every regulated occupation at least once every 10 years, including occupations outside DOPL. OPLR's recommendations are advisory rather than self-executing, so final decisions about statutes, rules, and agency practices remain with the Legislature and relevant agencies. The process also allows for public input and stakeholder engagement.

A recent example is [Utah's 2025 cosmetology reform](#). After OPLR found that cosmetology training requirements did not consistently match consumer-safety risks, the Legislature passed S.B. 330 to better align the licensing structure with the actual skills and oversight needed in the profession.

Sources & Further Readings

Recommended for further reading:

- [Office of Professional Licensure Review](#)
- [OPLR Publications](#)
- [DOPL License Lookup & Verification](#)
- [DOPL Licenses](#)
- [DOPL File a Complaint](#)

Citations:

Utah Code Ann. tit. 13, ch. 1b. Office of Professional Licensure Review. Utah State Legislature.
https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title13/Chapter1B/C13-1b_2022050420220504.pdf

Utah Code Ann. tit. 58, ch. 1. Division of Professional Licensing Act. Utah State Legislature.
https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title58/C58_1800010118000101.pdf

Utah Code Ann. § 78A-3-103. Supreme Court—Rulemaking, judges pro tempore, and practice of law. Utah State Legislature.
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Utah Division of Professional Licensing. DOPL home. Utah Department of Commerce.
<https://commerce.utah.gov/dopl/>

Utah Division of Professional Licensing. Licensee Lookup & Verification System. Utah Department of Commerce.
<https://secure.utah.gov/llv/search/index.html>

Utah Division of Real Estate. Division of Real Estate home. Utah Department of Commerce.
<https://commerce.utah.gov/realestate/>

Utah State Board of Education. Educator licensing.
<https://schools.utah.gov/licensing/index>

Utah Courts. Supreme Court Rules of Professional Practice.
<https://legacy.utcourts.gov/rules/scrp.php>

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<https://commerce.utah.gov/oplr/>

Utah Office of Professional Licensure Review. (2025). 2024 periodic review: Cosmetology. Utah Department of Commerce.
<https://commerce.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/OPLR-Cosmetology-Report-3.pdf>

Utah Legislature. (2025). S.B. 330, Cosmetology Modifications. Utah State Legislature.
<https://le.utah.gov/~2025/bills/static/SB0330.html>