



34th Biennial Institute
FOR **Georgia Legislators**

Update from the Joint Blue- Ribbon Committee to Investigate Licensing Issues



JOINT BLUE-RIBBON COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE LICENSING ISSUES

Chairman Matt Hatchett

Chairman Blake Tillery

LICENSEES IN GEORGIA

- In FY 2024, SOS managed **545,518 active licenses**, including:
 - 40,771 new licenses issued
 - 215,667 renewals issued
- The SOS office licenses **186 professions**, the five largest of which are:
 1. Registered Professional Nurse – Single State (134k)
 2. Master Cosmetologist (50k)
 3. Registered Professional Nurse – eNLC (39k)
 4. Licensed Practical Nurse – Single State (29k)
 5. Professional Engineer (21k)

SECRETARY OF STATE (SOS) - PROFESSIONAL LICENSING DIVISION

- **42 boards** divided into 8 groups: Healthcare 1, 2, and 3, Trades 1, 2, and 3, and Section 8.
- FY 2023 Revenue: **\$28,007,718**
FY 2023 State Funds Appropriated: **\$8,274,996**
- FY 2024 headcount: **95**
(Projected) FY 2025 headcount: **104**
- Currently upgrading the application and management system: older 'MLO' system is being phased out for the new 'GOALS' system.

Secretary of State - Professional Licensing Division Revenue and Funding History, 2018 - 2025								
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*	2025*
Payments to Treasury	\$19,651,272.17	\$21,030,516.78	\$17,965,949.34	\$23,521,660.07	\$17,604,446.03	\$28,007,718.42	\$19,000,000.00	\$21,000,000.00
State Funds to serve Applicants/Licensees	\$8,485,612.00	\$8,456,460.00	\$8,354,953.00	\$7,813,819.00	\$8,274,996.00	\$8,274,996.00	\$9,059,033.00	\$10,631,280.00
Percent	43%	40%	47%	33%	47%	30%	48%	51%

Source: Presentation from the Secretary of State's Office, June 26, 2024. Available here: https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/document/docs/default-source/house-study-committee-document-library-page/joint-blue-ribbon/ga-works-ppt-blue-ribbon-6-26-24.pdf?sfvrsn=6a3ffb7_2

Professional Licensing Division



RECENT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

- In the last 5 years, the General Assembly passed **30 pieces of legislation** to improve access to professional licensing in Georgia, including entering into **8 compacts**. Here are a few highlights:
 1. HB 880 (Rep. Bethany Ballard – 2024 Session) – The spouses of servicemembers can practice without a license once they have applied for a license with the board and while the application process is ongoing.
 2. HB 155 (Rep. Chuck Martin – 2023 Session) – The Professional Licensing Boards Division must issue licenses by endorsement for any profession other than firefighter, healthcare provider, or a law enforcement officer. Applicants must live in the state and have a current license in another state, among other requirements.
 3. SB 27 (Sen. Bruce Thompson – 2021 Session) – Extends the deadline for current or former servicemembers to apply for immediate issuance of a state license or certification from the applicable regulatory board from 180 days after discharge to two years. Additionally, it provides the board with discretion to extend the timeline.

RECENT BUDGET CHANGES

- FY 2025: **\$1,782,178** for an additional 17 employees, temporary staff to address the current backlog of license applications and appeals, and pay raises. An additional **\$405,434** for investigators to aid with complaints received by SOS, including the Professional Licensing Division.
- FY 2024: **\$252,780** for four positions to address complaint and licensure volume, including two specifically for the Board of Nursing. An additional **\$145,600** was provided in the Amended FY 2024 budget for temporary employees to help address application backlog.
- FY 2023: **\$764,919** in funds to provide a \$5,000 COLA to division employees.
- FY 2022: **\$150,000** for two additional analysts and temporary employees to issue permits to nurses to administer vaccinations.
- FY 2021: **\$150,000** in the Amended FY 2021 budget for additional employees to issue permits to nurses to administer vaccinations.

State launches new license and extends renewal deadline amidst complaints

Hundreds of thousands of professionals continue working under the old system while the new online system is being rolled out.

Georgia's Secretary of State Office weighing in on recent licensing issues



The new licensing software called GOALS was launched last October, but some professionals say they're having trouble renewing crucial



Georgia professionals impacted by licensing system issues, leaders ask for patience



Officials with the Secretary of State's Office said they are working to resolve the challenges.

Red patients

In Georgia, the Board of Professional Regulation is working to get from a college the

LOCAL

Georgia professionals are still waiting to get state-issued professional licenses



treating

something you can't get



Georgia General Assembly

State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

May 13, 2024

Office of Georgia Secretary of State
214 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Secretary Raffensperger,

Small businesses and those they employ are the backbone of our state's economy and the pillars of our communities. They voluntarily sponsor the local teams and clubs and support the adult literacy initiatives, shelters, churches and countless other civic pursuits. They generate millions in local revenue through income, property, occupancy and inventory taxes paid.

The current tough economy presents enough barriers on these critical businesses' ability to keep their doors open - we will not allow licensing to be another onerous impediment that increases undue burden.

Through countless constituent cries for help we have identified difficulties obtaining and renewing licenses, certifications and other services statutorily mandated and regulated by the Georgia Secretary of State's Professional Licensing Boards Division (the Division). Website issues hinder the ability to load test results required for certifications and licenses and the application process to obtain and renew licenses. The Division is dismissive at best, literally failing to respond, leaving untold phone calls, emails and messages unanswered. When they do respond it is merely to say they are working on it.

The Division's abstention of accountability effectively places unnecessary hurdles that are prohibiting new businesses from opening and shuttering existing businesses. Therefore, we are determined to step in and resolve these frustrating inefficiencies they are causing our invaluable workforce that is already stretched too thin.

As presiding officers of the General Assembly, we are leading this effort by appointing a joint Blue-Ribbon Committee to investigate licensing issues within the Division. This committee is charged with soliciting input from the customers the Division is meant to serve, probing the Secretary and staff on the underlying causes leading to these difficulties, and any other fact finding necessary for the development of potential solutions and recommendations. We are requesting they complete their incredibly important work with a conclusive report to be presented no later than December 31, 2024.

From the House:
Chairman Hatchett, co-chair
Leader Efration
Chairman Wiedower
Chairman Prince

From the Senate:
Chairman Tillery, co-chair
Leader Gooch
Chairman Walker
Senator Mallow

Sincerely,

Speaker, Jon G. Burns

Lt. Governor, Burt Jones

JOINT BLUE-RIBBON COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE LICENSING ISSUES

House Appointees:

- Rep. Matt Hatchett, Co-Chair
- Rep. Chuck Efration
- Rep. Marcus Wiedower
- Rep. Brian Prince

Senate Appointees:

- Sen. Blake Tillery, Co-Chair
- Sen. Steve Gooch
- Sen. Larry Walker
- Sen. Derek Mallow

JOINT BLUE-RIBBON COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE LICENSING ISSUES



"Georgia Blue-Ribbon committee holds first meeting to look into state licensing issues". | IALive.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyVHPnTuwts&ab_channel=IALive.

The joint committee held four meetings:

1. June 26, 2024: Middle Georgia State University – Macon, Georgia
2. July 25, 2024: Georgia State Capitol – Atlanta, Georgia
3. September 9, 2024: Middle Georgia State University – Macon, Georgia
4. October 18, 2024: Georgia Southern University – Statesboro, Georgia

JOINT BLUE-RIBBON COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE LICENSING ISSUES – BY THE NUMBERS

- The met and heard testimony for nearly **12 hours** over four meetings, which included hearing from:
 - **30 members of the public** providing comments and concerns.
 - **8 agency or subject matter experts**, including SOS board and division directors and nationally-recognized professional licensing experts.
 - **7 licensing boards**, including the Boards of Nursing, Residential and General Contractors, Cosmetology and Barbers, and Funeral Directors.
- The committee received additional written testimony from **8 industry groups**, current and former board members, and **17 members of the public**.

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

1. Customer service and response times
 - At the beginning of 2024, call wait times could be hours and call backs could take days. Significant improvements to call wait times and response times have been made in recent months.
 - Application deficiency emails were sometimes vague/unhelpful, if sent at all.
 - In-person availability of staff is inconsistent or, at times, non-existent.
2. Responsibilities of the Professional Licensing Division vs. individual licensing boards
 - Board members are uncompensated volunteers that, in most cases, also maintain full-time jobs or businesses in their fields.
 - Board members are expected to review individual applications, as well as participate in rulemaking, addressing complaints and investigations, and evaluating related education programs.
3. Review the number of licenses offered and consider eliminating un- or under-utilized licenses

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

4. License application requirements can be burdensome for applicants, board members, and staff
 - Some parts of applications are still mailed-in or scanned; new 'GOALS' system should resolve this.
 - Reviewing complicated applications is time-consuming for both board members and staff.
 - Consider ways to streamline the process, including simplifying or eliminating certain application requirements and encourage transcript sharing with universities/technical colleges.
5. Working conditions for the Professional Licensing Division staff can be improved upon
 - The current office building for the Professional Licensing Division is in disrepair. SOS is reviewing whether a move to a different facility in Macon, which would be in both better condition and at a savings to the state, is possible.
 - Consider ways to improve turnover rates for the division's employees, including customer service and board staff.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE – CALL-CENTER METRICS

- As of August 27, the Professional Licensing Division's call center **cleared the call queues** and they have remained cleared since.
- Since August, the SOS call center averaged **2,677 inbound calls**, of which 1,348 were related to professional licensing.
- Average wait for a response or answer is currently **33 minutes**, down from days earlier this year.
- Abandoned call percentage has dropped to **21.56%** in October.
 - The division has set a goal for the abandoned call rate to be no more than 4%.
- Per day headcount in October increased from a low of **36** to a high of **50**.

QUESTIONS?



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