

YOU WORKED FOR IT, YOU EARNED IT IT'S TIME TO SPEAK UP FOR YOURSELF, YOUR PROFESSION

By Myra Irizarry, PBA Director of Government Affairs

Like you, I have worked hard and earned my spot in my field. Throughout my time at the Professional Beauty Association (PBA), representing your interests at both the state and federal levels, you have educated me about the many challenges beauty professionals face: dishonest business practices and individuals, lack of enforcement, state law makers undermining regulations set in place to protect consumers, and a public that does not know the difference.

THE UNDERGROUND

There is an "underground economy" lurking behind the shadows in our industry that is supported by unlicensed individuals offering services that put an unknowing public's health at risk. I have heard from many of you describing in detail instances of unlicensed individuals offering services, ranging from haircuts, manicures and pedicures, to facials and chemical peels. These unlicensed individuals are often setting up shop in their homes, hotels and other public places. There are even public booking services to help individuals manage their unsuspecting clients; booking companies that do not ask whether or not the provider is licensed, trained or qualified to perform these services. But, the scariest part of all - consumers do not even know this happening.

Health and safety are a major priority in our industry and consumers have the right to know if their service provider is legitimate and licensed, or just an individual pretending to be a professional. As a consumer of beauty services and products, it is offensive to me that an unlicensed individual would carelessly gamble with my health and safety. Prior to joining this great industry, I would have never known or even thought to ask if my stylist or esthetician is licensed. Like most, I have an expectation that the provider I am seeing has gone through the proper training and education to perform the services. Why would I, as a consumer, ever stop to think that a person would mislead me, take my money, and then hope that nothing goes wrong during my service?

AN ILLUSION OF ENFORCEMENT

Over the past several years, our industry has consistently faced legislation calling for the review of cosmetology. Each state in the U.S. regulates cosmetology and there are indeed laws in place to protect the consumer. So, an obvious question you may be asking yourself right now: "Who enforces the rules that you live by and comply with every day behind the chair or managing your salon, and every time you pay to renew your license or complete your continuing education courses?"

State boards are in place to protect the consumer and regulate the industry by requiring that you are educated, pass your exams, and are licensed. State inspectors report violations to their board. The authority of your state's cosmetology board is exercised through regulations but state boards are constrained by what the legislature has passed as law. A board may have to rely on their state's attorney office to enforce fines or bring charges against an unlicensed individual.

A state cosmetology board's hands are often tied by limitations in their ability to enforce their authority. Boards that can fully enforce via regulations must still face the challenge of finding unlicensed individuals and relying on the individuals to stop violating the law – a daunting and difficult task.

ONLY YOU CAN CREATE CHANGE

It is easy to sit back and complain about these issues... to just remain offended at the lack of regard for the professionalism of the beauty industry. Or we as an industry can come together to overcome these challenges, expose the damaging and unethical underground beauty industry, and educate your clients on what it means to be a LICENSED professional.

Consumers don't know that to become licensed, you must go through hundreds of hours of education and training and pass a state-regulated exam to protect them from potential harm. Taking the time to explain this process and why it's important to keep them safe will change consumers' perceptions of the entire industry. Educating your clients will help them understand that you care for their health and safety, you are serious about your services, and you took the time to go to school, pass your exams, and earn your license.

It's time to take back your industry, and start talking about what you do and what it means to you. You are not part of an industry defeated by challenges. You are educated; you are trained; and you are an intelligent, licensed professional proud to provide safe services in an industry that responds with passion.

Talk about your passion and your profession with your clients and ask them to share it with their friends. It's these conversations and the education of your clients that create the change needed in our industry. Our hope is that through this education, consumers will no longer assume they are in safe hands; they will ask the right questions and seek out those that are the real professionals. Join PBA's "I Am A Professional. I Am Licensed" movement to show your pride for your profession and learn the facts to help you educate your clients. Go to probeauty.org/iam to learn more about why licensing is essential to protect consumers, your career, and the future of beauty industry.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Myra Irizarry is the Director of Government Affairs for the Professional Beauty Association (PBA). PBA advocates for the rights of every member and is dedicated to tracking, introducing and responding to legislation at both the state and federal levels with potential to affect the beauty industry. Along with our Government Advocacy program, PBA provides our members with Education, Signature Events, Charitable Outreach, Research and Business Resources. Visit probeauty.org for more information. Contact Myra directly at myra@probeauty.org.