

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1796 (Jackson)

As Amended April 16, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes a new category of licensed professional for interior designers within the California Architects Board (CAB), defines the scope of practice for professional interior design, and expands the membership of the CAB to include a professional interior designer.

Major Provisions

- 1) Establish the Licensed Professional Interior Designer Practice Act.
- 2) Define "professional interior design" as the planning, design, and oversight of interior spaces buildings and structures in California in a manner complying with generally applicable codes and regulations, including any of the following related to interior spaces or environments as part of a construction project:
 - a) Investigation, evaluation, consultation, and advice.
 - b) The preparation of plans, specifications, documentation, and assistance in the governmental review process related to the functional and aesthetic arrangement of interior spaces, including the preparation of professional interior instruments of service.
 - c) The selection and specification of materials, finishes, fixtures, and furniture.
 - d) The coordination of the work with technical and special consultants.
 - e) The administration of contracts and observation of construction.
- 3) Exclude from the definition of "professional interior design" any of the following:
 - a) The practice of a professional engineer or the practice of a professional land surveyor.
 - b) Services that constitute the practice of architecture, except as provided.
 - c) Services that constitute the practice of a structural engineer.
 - d) Changes to the construction classification of the building or structure according to the California Building Standards Code.
 - e) Any work that would require structural engineering analysis or would require control for a building's structural systems, including the lateral force resisting system and the seismic bracing of components and equipment regulated by the authority having jurisdiction through adoption of a building code or other regulations.
- 4) Expand the membership of the California Architects Board (CAB) to include one professional interior designer and vest the CAB with all of the functions, duties, powers, purposes, responsibilities, and jurisdiction concerning the practice of professional interior design under the Licensed Professional Interior Designer Practice Act.

- 5) Require the CAB to exercise the following functions, powers, and duties no later than July 1, 2028:
 - a) Conduct or authorize examinations to ascertain the fitness and qualifications of applicants for licensure and issue a license to those who are found to be fit and qualified.
 - b) Prescribe rules and regulations for a method of examination of candidates, with shall include designation of the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) Examination as the examination for licensure as a professional interior designer.
 - c) Conduct hearings on proceedings to revoke, suspend, or refuse to issue licensure.
 - d) Promulgate rules and regulations required for the administration of the Licensed Professional Interior Designer Practice Act.
- 6) Provide that it is a misdemeanor for a person to engage in the practice of professional interior design or use the titles "licensed professional interior designer" or otherwise imply or indicate that they are licensed under the Licensed Professional Interior Designer Practice Act.
- 7) Provide that the Licensed Professional Interior Designer Practice Act does not prevent or restrict any of the following activities:
 - a) The employment by a professional interior designer association, partnership, or corporation furnishing interior design services for remuneration of any person who is not a licensed professional interior designer to perform services in various capacities as needed, provided that the person does not represent themselves as, or use the title of, "licensed professional interior designer."
 - b) Use of the title "interior designer" on the part of a person not licensed under this chapter, provided that person does not represent themselves as, or use the title of, "licensed professional interior designer."
 - c) The practice, services, or activities of any person licensed in this state under any other law who is engaging in the profession or occupation for which they are licensed or otherwise legally permitted to engage in.
 - d) Professional services limited to the design of kitchen and bath spaces or the specification of products for kitchen and bath areas in residential settings.
 - e) The ability of a licensed professional interior designer to supervise their own projects.
- 8) Exempt professional engineers, land surveyors, architects, and contractors from the Licensed Professional Interior Designer Practice Act with the exception of title protections.
- 9) Repeal the authority of the California Council for Interior Design (CCIDC) to issue a CID commercial designation and authorizes CCIDC to issue a professional designation until an undefined date in 2027.
- 10) Add licensed professional interior designers to the definition of "design professional" contained within the Civil Code.

COMMENTS

History of Interior Design Regulation in California. While the phrase "interior design" is commonly associated with decorative services focused exclusively on visual elements such as furniture arrangements or wall colors, professional interior designers utilize considerable technical knowledge to ensure that indoor spaces are safe and functional in addition to aesthetically pleasing. Many interior designers are frequently involved in designing nonstructural interior elements and preparing code-compliant interior plans and documents and often work with building codes, accessibility standards, and contractors. During its most recent sunset review, CCIDC attributed public misconceptions regarding the scope of the interior design profession to the rise in popularity of design-oriented reality television, arguing that media portrayals "oversimplify and misrepresent the complexity and technical expertise required in professional practice."

Interior designers have never been formally licensed in California; however, the profession's scope of work has historically overlapped with services provided by other professionals regulated by licensing entities within the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), including engineers, contractors, and architects. In 1988, the Legislature enacted SB 354 (Craven), sponsored by the California Legislative Conference on Interior Design (CLDIC), which required a study on the necessity and feasibility of licensing interior designers. The report distinguished the work of interior *decorators*, involving only minor public health, safety, or welfare concerns, from the more substantive work of interior *designers*. The study recommended that interior decorators be merely registered but that interior designers be licensed by a state board.

In 1990, SB 153 (Craven) was amended to provide for a voluntary certification program through a private interior design organization, with statutory protection of terms or titles indicating certification. While less comprehensive than a "Practice Act" administered by a state board, the bill's "Title Act" framework was identified as politically acceptable to Governor George Deukmejian, who did not support new licensing programs. CCIDC was established in January 1992 to administer the Title Act.

CCIDC's organization and operations were repeatedly criticized by the Legislature during early sunset reviews, and the council was briefly allowed to sunset. In response to a new unified International Building Code, CCIDC itself sponsored AB 1096 (Romero) in 1999 to replace the existing certification program with a registration program under a new Board of Interior Design within the DCA. The bill was opposed by the CAB, along with the DCA. While AB 1096 was passed by the Legislature, the bill was vetoed by Governor Gray Davis.

Following several subsequent sunset reviews for CCIDC, SB 1312 (Yee/Calderon) was introduced in 2008 to repeal and replace the CAB with a new California Architects and Registered Interior Designers Board within the DCA, whose professional membership would include both licensed architects and registered interior designers. The bill was sponsored by the Interior Design Coalition of California (IDCC) and supported by several national interior design associations, but was opposed by CLCID, the CAB, and the American Institute of Architects, revealing a schism within the design profession regarding its future. After the bill passed its policy committee hearing as a "work in progress," it was amended to place interior designers under a new Registered Interior Designers Committee within the existing CAB. The amended bill ultimately failed to pass off the Senate Floor.

In 2012, AB 2482 (Ma) was introduced to establish a new California Registered Interior Designers Board within the DCA to license and regulate registered interior designers. While the bill would have established a new licensure category under a state board, later amendments to the bill declared an intent to merely "permit an additional career path" for some interior designers "by providing the opportunity for licensure for those who so choose." The language further declared that "it is not the intent of the Legislature to affect the existing practice of interior design in any way." AB 2482 died without receiving a policy committee hearing in the Assembly after receiving a critical analysis.

During CCIDC's sunset review in 2017, the Legislature considered whether a new certification category should be created for commercial interior designers. The background paper noted that an October 2016 report on occupational licensing reform released by the Little Hoover Commission supported this proposal. The next sunset review of CCIDC took place in 2022. During the intervening period, the CCIDC board had elected to proactively establish an optional commercial designation for CIDs. This designation was subsequently codified in 2023 through SB 816 (Roth).

Sunrise Review. This bill proposes to establish a new category of license within the CAB which would be required to engage in the practice of professional interior design, as defined. When there are proposals for new or expanded regulation of an occupation, legislators and administrative officials are expected to weigh arguments regarding the necessity of the proposed regulation, determine the appropriate level of regulation (e.g., registration, certification, or licensure), and select a set of standards (education, experience, examinations). As a result, the Legislature uses a process known as "sunrise" to review and assess the proposals.

The sunrise review process includes a questionnaire and a set of evaluative scales to be completed by the group supporting regulation. The questionnaire is an objective tool for collecting and analyzing information needed to arrive at accurate, informed, and publicly supportable decisions regarding the merits of regulatory proposals. A questionnaire was prepared by the sponsor of this bill, which was extensively analyzed by the Assembly Committee on Business and Professions during its consideration of the proposal.

According to the Author

"AB 1796 would define, license, and regulate the practice of commercial interior design by the California Architects Board (CAB). Our interior design professionals in California reflect the state's diversity, with approximately 78% women, over 20% identifying as LGBTQ+, and 43% identifying as non-white practitioners. However, the profession of interior design is currently unregulated in California's Business and Professions Code, limiting these professionals as the only unlicensed design members on commercial construction projects. The absence of a Practice Act and formal license pathway in California forces commercial interior designers to practice under the oversight of other licensed professionals to engage with any part of the construction industry, like bidding for work, procuring insurance, or submitting drawings to Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJs), despite being qualified to perform this work independently. The current system forces designers to relinquish ownership of their work, as they cannot stamp and seal their own drawings for permits. As a result, they do not retain ownership over their intellectual property, limiting economic opportunities for a profession largely composed of women, LGBTQ, and non-white professionals. Furthermore, the lack of state regulation creates gaps in public safety and confusion for consumers regarding the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of commercial interior designers."

Arguments in Support

The *International Interior Design Association* (IIDA) is sponsoring this bill. According to IIDA: "Professional interior designers in California already perform highly technical, code-governed work in a wide range of environments, including offices, hospitals, schools, laboratories, multi-family housing, government facilities, and airports. In our survey of interior designers in California, 89 percent reported that most (76–100 percent) of their projects involve regulated or permitted interior spaces. All respondents reported regular coordination with architects, engineers, and other licensed design professionals. Despite performing complex work daily in commercial spaces the current law does not formally license our professional practice. Our work impacts millions of Californians that live, learn, travel, heal and work in these commercial spaces." IIDA further argues that "AB 1796 strengthens public protection, clarifies the scope of practice, supports a diverse and experienced workforce, and ensures professionals performing regulated interior work are subject to clear standards and oversight."

Arguments in Opposition

The *American Institute of Architects California* opposes this bill, writing: "For several years, we have heard anecdotally that the rationale for this legislation stems from situations in which construction documents prepared by interior designers were not accepted by a small number of authorities having jurisdiction. There is a lack of clarity regarding the underlying causes of these reported rejections by jurisdictions, as no data or supporting evidence has been presented as part of the licensure discussions. In practice, plan rejections occur for a wide range of reasons and are a routine part of the construction document review process in California. It has not been demonstrated whether interior designers are subject to a different regulatory standard than other licensed professionals, whether their submissions fail to meet applicable code requirements, whether they fall outside the scope permitted under current law, or whether the issue is simply a function of their unlicensed status within the existing regulatory framework."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, the CAB indicates it would need to create and implement a new licensing structure, which is expected to increase applications, inquiries, outreach, and reporting. The CAB, among other things, would need to verify exam eligibility and licensing requirements, and anticipates an increase in investigative complaints. The CAB estimates the following special fund costs:

- a) Ongoing costs of \$255,000 annually for two permanent staff positions to support increased licensing activities. The CAB estimates receiving 671 new license applications, with each license requiring approximately 6 hours to process.
- b) Ongoing costs of \$141,000 annually for one permanent staff position to support additional enforcement workload assuming 100 cases annually at an estimated 14 hours per case.
- c) One-time costs of \$141,000 for one limited-term staff position to implement regulations needed to implement the bill, including exam and licensing processes, disciplinary guidelines and fines, and all other necessary regulations.
- d) Absorbable costs of \$15,000 annually in travel costs and per diem for an additional board member.

Additionally, the DCA estimates one-time IT costs of \$274,000.

VOTES

ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 13-1-5

YES: Berman, Johnson, Addis, Ahrens, Bains, Elhawary, Haney, Hart, Jackson, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

NO: Irwin

ABS, ABST OR NV: Alanis, Bauer-Kahan, Caloza, Chen, Hadwick

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: April 16, 2026

CONSULTANT: Robert Sumner / B. & P. / (916) 319-3301

FN: 0002652